SAGE

History of Science, Philosophy and Culture in Indian Civilization

General Editor D.P. Chattopadhyaya

Volume IX Part 3

Women of India: Colonial and Post-Colonial Periods

edited by
BHARATI RAY

PHISPC

The volumes of the **PROJECT ON THE HISTORY OF SCIENCE, PHILOSOPHY AND CULTURE IN INDIAN CIVILIZATION** aim at discovering the main aspects of India's heritage and present them in an interrelated way. These volumes, in spite of their unitary look, recognize the difference between the areas of material civilization and those of ideational culture. The Project is not being executed by a single group of thinkers and writers who are methodologically uniform or ideologically identical in their commitments. In fact contributions are made by different scholars with different ideological persuasions and methodological approaches. The Project is marked by what may be called 'methodological pluralism'. In spite of its primary historical character, this Project, both in its conceptualization and execution, has been shaped by many scholars drawn from different disciplines. It is for the first time that an endeavour of such a unique and comprehensive character has been undertaken to study critically a major world civilization like India.

The volume, *Women of India: Colonial and Post-Colonial Periods*, in six sections viz., Family/Law, Body/Sexuality, Knowledge System, Work, Creativity/Voices, and Politics, offers insights into women's lives in colonial and post-colonial India, fully cognizant of the complex interlinking of class, caste, ethnicity, religion, nation, state policy and gender. Historically, the period discussed in this study coincides with the end of one era and the beginning of another, with two hundred years of British colonial rule and, following that, fifty years of an independent India.

The essays in this volume explore the operation of power and the resistance to it, the space that was denied to the disadvantaged gender–women–and the space they created for themselves, and the history of the mutual roles of women and men in colonial and post-colonial India. Eminent scholars on women's studies and reputed scientists, drawn from diverse disciplines and located in different parts of India, present themes that are crucial to the understanding and experience of gender in India. In so doing, they add to our historical knowledge and also, it is hoped, partly change our vision of Indian history. Taken as a whole, the essays raise our awareness of overt and hidden discriminations, and restricted options and possibilities for women's agency, while reminding us of the multiple ways in which women manage to survive and thrive despite familial, community and state neglect.

Women of India:
Colonial and Post-Colonial Periods

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Volume IX Part 3

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Project of History of Indian Science, Philosophy and Culture

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General Introduction

I

It is understandable that man, shaped by Nature, would like to know Nature. The human ways of knowing Nature are evidently diverse, theoretical and practical, scientific and technological, artistic and spiritual. This diversity has, on scrutiny, been found to be neither exhaustive nor exclusive. The complexity of physical nature, life-world and, particularly, human mind is so enormous that it is futile to follow a single method for comprehending all the aspects of the world in which we are situated.

One need not feel bewildered by the variety and complexity of the worldly phenomena. After all, both from traditional wisdom and our daily experience, we know that our own nature is not quite alien to the structure of the world. Positively speaking, the elements and forces that are out there in the world are also present in our body-mind complex, enabling us to adjust ourselves to our environment. Not only the natural conditions but also the social conditions of life have instructive similarities between them. This is not to underrate in any way the difference between the human ways of life all over the world. It is partly due to the variation in climatic conditions and partly due to the distinctness of production-related tradition, history and culture.

Three broad approaches are discernible in the works on historiography of civilization, comprising science and technology, art and architecture, social sciences and institutions. Firstly, some writers are primarily interested in discovering the general laws which govern all civilizations spread over different continents. They tend to underplay what they call the noisy local events of the external world and peculiarities of different languages, literatures and histories. Their accent is on the unity of Nature, the unity of science and the unity of mankind. The second group of writers, unlike the generalist or transcendentalist ones, attach primary importance to the distinctiveness of every culture. To these writers human freedom and creativity are extremely important and basic in character. Social institutions and the cultural articulations of human consciousness, they argue, are bound to be expressive of the concerned people's consciousness. By implication they tend to reject concepts like archetypal consciousness, universal mind and providential history. There is a third group of writers who offer a composite picture of civilizations, drawing elements both from their local as well as common characteristics. Every culture has its local roots and peculiarities. At the same time, it is pointed out that due to demographic migration and immigration over the centuries an element of compositeness emerges almost in every culture. When, due to a natural calamity or political exigencies people move from one part of the world to another, they carry with them, among other things, their language, cultural inheritance and their ways of living.

In the light of the above facts, it is not at all surprising that comparative anthropologists and philologists are intrigued by the striking similarity between different language families and the rites, rituals and myths of different peoples. Speculative philosophers of history, heavily relying on the findings of epigraphy, ethnography, archaeology and theology, try to show in very general terms that the particulars and universals of culture are 'essentially' or 'secretly' interrelated. The spiritual aspects of culture like dance and music, beliefs pertaining to life, death and duties, on analysis, are found to be mediated by the material forms of life like weather forecasting, food production, urbanization and invention of script. The transition from the oral culture to the written one was made possible because of the mastery of symbols and rules of measurement. Speech precedes grammar, poetry prosody. All these show how the 'matters' and 'forms' of life are so subtly interwoven.

II

The PHISPC publications on History of Science, Philosophy and Culture in Indian Civilization, in spite of their unitary look, do recognize the differences between the areas of material civilization and those of ideational culture. It is not a work of a single author. Nor is it being executed by a group of thinkers and writers who are methodologically uniform or ideologically identical in their commitments. In conceiving the Project we have interacted with, and been influenced by, the writings and views of many Indian and non-Indian thinkers.

The attempted unity of this Project lies in its aim and inspiration. We have in India many scholarly works written by Indians on different aspects of our civilization and culture. Right from the pre-Christian era to our own time, India has drawn the attention of various countries of Asia, Europe and Africa. Some of these writings are objective and informative and many others are based on insufficient information and hearsay, and therefore not quite reliable, but they have their own value. Quality and view-points keep on changing not only because of the adequacy and inadequacy of evidence but also, and perhaps more so, because of the bias and prejudice, religious and political conviction, of the writers.

Besides, it is to be remembered that history, like Nature, is not an open book to be read alike by all. The past is mainly enclosed and only partially disclosed. History is, therefore, partly objective or 'real' and largely a matter of construction. This is one of the reasons why some historians themselves think that it is a form of literature or art. However, it does not mean that historical construction is 'anarchic' and arbitrary. Certainly, imagination plays an important role in it.

But its character is basically dependent upon the *questions* which the historian raises and wants to understand or answer in terms of the ideas and actions of human beings in the past ages. In a way, history, somewhat like the natural sciences, is engaged in answering questions and in exploring relationships of cause and effect between events and developments across time. While in the natural sciences, the scientist poses questions about nature in the form of hypotheses, expecting to elicit authoritative answers to such questions, the historian studies the past, partly for the sake of understanding it for its own sake and partly also for the light which the past throws upon the present, and the possibilities which it opens up for moulding the future. But the difference between the two approaches must not be lost sight of. The scientist is primarily interested in discovering laws and framing theories, in terms of which, different events and processes can be connected and anticipated. His interest in the conditions or circumstances attending the concerned events is secondary. Therefore, scientific laws turn out to be basically abstract and easily expressible in terms of mathematical language. In contrast, the historian's main interest centres round the *specific* events, human ideas and actions, not *general* laws. So, the historian, unlike the scientist, is obliged to pay primary attention to the circumstances of the events he wants to study. Consequently, history, like most other humanistic disciplines, is concrete and particularist. This is not to deny the obvious truth that historical events and processes consisting of human ideas and actions show some trend or other and weave some pattern or other. If these trends and patterns were not there at all in history, the study of history as a branch of knowledge would not have been profitable or instructive. But one must recognize that historical trends and patterns, unlike scientific laws and theories, are not general or purported to be universal in their scope.

III

The aim of this Project is to discover the main aspects of Indian culture and present them in an interrelated way. Since our culture has influenced, and has been influenced by, the neighbouring cultures of West Asia, Central Asia, East Asia and South-East Asia, attempts have been made here to trace and study these influences in their mutuality. It is well known that during the last three centuries, European presence in India, both political and cultural, has been very widespread. In many volumes of the Project considerable attention has been paid to Europe and through Europe to other parts of the world. For the purpose of a comprehensive cultural study of India, the existing political boundaries of the South Asia of today are more of a hindrance than help. Cultures, like languages, often transcend the bounds of changing political territories.

If the inconstant political geography is not a reliable help to the understanding of the layered structure and spread of culture, a somewhat comparable problem is encountered in the area of historical periodization. Periodization or segmenting time is a very tricky affair. When exactly one period ends and another begins is not precisely ascertainable. The periods of history designated as ancient, medieval and modern are purely conventional and merely heuristic in character. The varying scopes of history, local, national and continental or universal, somewhat like the periods of history, are unavoidably fuzzy and shifting. Amidst all these difficulties, the volume-wise details have been planned and worked out by the editors in consultation with the Project Director and the General Editor. I believe that the editors of different volumes have also profited from the reactions and suggestions of the contributors of individual chapters in planning the volumes.

Another aspect of Indian history which the volume-editors and contributors of the Project have carefully dealt with is the distinction and relation between civilization and culture. The material conditions which substantially shaped Indian civilization have been discussed in detail. From agriculture and industry to metallurgy and technology, from physics and chemical practices to the life sciences and different systems of medicines – all the branches of knowledge and skill which directly affect human life – form the heart of this Project. Since the periods covered by the PHISPC are extensive – prehistory, proto-history, early history, medieval history and modern history of India – we do not claim to have gone into all the relevant material conditions of human life. We had to be selective. Therefore, one should not be surprised if one finds that only some material aspects of Indian civilization have received our pointed attention, while the rest have been dealt with in principle or only alluded to.

One of the main aims of the Project has been to spell out the first principles of the philosophy of different schools, both pro-Vedic and anti-Vedic. The basic ideas of Buddhism, Jainism and Islam have been given their due importance. The special position accorded to philosophy is to be understood partly in terms of its proclaimed unifying character and partly to be explained in terms of the fact that different philosophical systems represent alternative world-views, cultural perspectives, their conflict and mutual assimilation.

Most of the volume-editors and at their instance the concerned contributors have followed a middle path between the extremes of narrativism and theoreticism. The underlying idea has been this: if, in the process of working out a comprehensive Project like this, every contributor attempts to narrate all those interesting things that he has in the back of his mind, the enterprise is likely to prove unmanageable. If, on the other hand, particular details are consciously forced into a fixed mould or pre-supposed theoretical structure, the details lose their particularity and interesting character. Therefore, depending on the nature of the problem of discourse, most of the writers have tried to reconcile in their presentation, the specificity of narrativism and the generality of theoretical orientation. This is a conscious editorial decision. Because, in the absence of a theory, however inarticulate it may be, the factual details tend to fall apart. Spiritual network or theoretical orientation makes historical details not only meaningful but also interesting and enjoyable.

Another editorial decision which deserves spelling out is the necessity or avoidability of duplication of the same theme in different volumes or even in the same volume. Certainly, this Project is not an assortment of several volumes. Nor is any volume intended to be a miscellany. This Project has been designed with a definite end in view and has a structure of its own. The character of the structure has admittedly been influenced by the variety of the themes accommodated within it. Again it must be understood that the complexity of structure is rooted in the aimed integrality of the Project itself.

IV

Long and in-depth editorial discussion has led us to several unanimous conclusions. Firstly, our Project is going to be *unique*, unrivalled and discursive in its attempt to integrate different forms of science, technology, philosophy and culture. Its comprehensive scope, continuous character and accent on culture distinguish it from the works of such Indian authors as P.C. Ray, B.N. Seal, Binoy Kumar Sarkar and S.N. Sen and also from such Euro-American writers as Lynn Thorndike, George Sarton and Joseph Needham. Indeed, it would be no exaggeration to suggest that it is for the first time that an endeavour of so comprehensive a character, in its exploration of the social, philosophical and cultural characteristics of a distinctive world civilization – that of India – has been attempted in the domain of scholarship.

Secondly, we try to show the linkages between different branches of learning as different modes of experience in an *organic* manner and without resorting to a kind of reductionism, materialistic or spiritualistic. The internal dialectics of organicism without reductionism allows fuzziness, discontinuity and discreteness within limits.

Thirdly, positively speaking, different modes of human experience – scientific, artistic, etc., have their own individuality, not necessarily autonomy. Since all these modes are modification and articulation of *human* experience, these are bound to have between them some finely graded commonness. At the same time, it has been recognized that reflection on different areas of experience and investigation brings to light new insights and findings. Growth of knowledge requires humans, in general, and scholars, in particular, to identify the distinctness of different branches of learning.

Fourthly, to follow simultaneously the twin principles of: (a) individuality of human experience as a whole, and (b) individuality of diverse disciplines, is not at all an easy task. Overlapping of themes and duplication of the terms of discourse become unavoidable at times. For example, in the context of *Dharmaśāstra*, the writer is bound to discuss the concept of value. The same concept also figures in economic discourse and also occurs in a discussion on fine arts. The conscious editorial decision has been that, while duplication should be kept to its minimum, for the sake of intended clarity of the themes under discussion, their reiteration must not be avoided at high intellectual cost.

Fifthly, the scholars working on the Project are drawn from widely different disciplines. They have brought to our notice an important fact that has clear relevance to our work. Many of our contemporary disciplines like economics and sociology did not exist, at least not in their present form, just two centuries or so ago. For example, before the middle of nineteenth century, sociology as a distinct branch of knowledge was unknown. The term is said to have been coined first by the French philosopher Auguste Comte in 1838. Obviously, this does not mean that the issues discussed in sociology were not there. Similarly, Adam Smith's (1723–90) famous work *The Wealth of Nations* is often referred to as the first authoritative statement of the principles of (what we now call) economics. Interestingly enough, the author was equally interested in ethics and jurisprudence. It is clear from history that over time the nature and scope of different disciplines undergo change, at times very radically. For example, in India the term '*Arthaśāstra*' does not mean the science of economics as understood today. Besides the principles of economics, the *Arthaśāstra* of ancient India discusses at length those of governance, diplomacy and military science.

Sixthly, this brings us to the next editorial policy followed in the Project. We have tried to remain very conscious of what may be called indeterminacy or inexactness of translation. When a word or expression of one language is translated into another, some loss of meaning or exactitude seems to be unavoidable. This is true not only in the bilingual relations like Sanskrit-English and Sanskrit-Arabic, but also in those of Hindi-Tamil and Hindi-Bengali. In recognition of the importance of language-bound and context-relative character of meaning we have solicited from many learned scholars, contributions, written in vernacular languages. In order to minimize the miseffect of semantic inexactitude we have solicited translational help from those bilingual scholars who know both English and the concerned vernacular language, Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Bengali or Marathi.

Seventhly and finally, perhaps the place of technology as a branch of knowledge in the composite universe of science and art merits some elucidation. Technology has been conceived in very many ways, e.g., as autonomous, as 'standing reserve', as liberating or enlargemental, and alienative or estrangemental force. The studies undertaken by the Project show that, in spite of its much emphasized mechanical and alienative characteristics, technology embodies a very useful mode of knowledge that is peculiar to man. The Greek root words of technology are *techne* (art) and *logos* (science). This is the basic justification of recognizing technology as closely related to both epistemology, the discipline of valid knowledge, and axiology, the discipline of freedom and values. It is in this context that we are reminded of the definition of man as *homo technikos*. In Sanskrit, the word closest to *techne* is *kalā* which means any practical art, any mechanical or fine art. In the Indian tradition, in *Śaivatantra*, for example, among the arts (*kalā*) are counted dance, drama, music, architecture, metallurgy, knowledge of dictionary, encyclopaedia and prosody. The closeness of the relation between arts and sciences, technology and other forms of knowledge are evident from these examples and was known to the ancient people. The human quest for knowledge involves the use of both head and hand. Without mind, the body is a corpse and the disembodied mind is a bare abstraction. Even for our appreciation of what is beautiful and the creation of what is valuable, we are required to exercise both our intellectual competence and physical capacity. In a manner of speaking, one might rightly affirm that our psychosomatic structure is a functional connector between what we are and what we could be, between the physical and the beyond. To suppose that there is a clear-cut distinction between the physical world and the psychosomatic one amounts to denial of the possible emergence of higher logico-mathematical, musical and other capacities. The very availability of aesthetic experience and creation proves that the supposed distinction is somehow overcome by what may be called the bodily self or embodied mind.

V

The ways of classification of arts and sciences are neither universal nor permanent. In the Indian tradition, in the *Ṛgveda*, for example, *vidyās* (or sciences) are said to be four in number: (i) *Trayī*, the triple Veda; (ii) *Ānvīkṣikī*, logic and metaphysics; (iii) *Daṇḍa-nīti*, science of governance; (iv) *Vārtta*, practical arts such as agriculture, commerce, medicine, etc. Manu speaks of a fifth *vidyā*, viz., *Ātma-vidyā*, knowledge of self or of spiritual truth. According to many others, *vidyā* has fourteen divisions, viz., the four Vedas, the six Vedāṅgas, the Purāṇas, the Mīmāṁsā, Nyāya, and Dharma or law. At times, the four *Upavedas* are also recognized by some as *vidyā*. *Kalās* are said to be 33 or even 64.

In the classical tradition of India, the word *śāstra* has at times been used as synonym of *vidyā*. *Vidyā* denotes instrument of teaching, manual or compendium of rules, religious or scientific treatise. The word *śāstra* is usually found after the word referring to the subject of the book, e.g. *Dharma-śāstra*, *Artha-śāstra*, *Alaṁkara-śāstra* and *Mokṣa-śāstra*. Two other words which have been frequently used to denote different branches of knowledge are *jñāna* and *vijñāna*. While *jñāna* means knowing, knowledge, especially the higher form of it, *vijñāna* stands for the act of distinguishing or discerning, understanding, comprehending and recognizing. It means worldly or profane knowledge as distinguished from *jñāna*, knowledge of the divine.

It must be said here that the division of knowledge is partly conventional and partly administrative or practical. It keeps on changing from culture to culture, from age to age. It is difficult to claim that the distinction between *jñāna* and *vijñāna* or that between science and art is universal. It is true that even before the advent of modern age, both in the East and the West, two basic aspects of sciences started gaining recognition. One is the *specialized character* of what we call scientific knowledge. The other is the concept of *trained skill* which was brought close to scientific knowledge. In the medieval Europe, the expression 'the seven liberal sciences' has so often been used simultaneously with 'the seven liberal arts', meaning thereby, the group of studies by the *Trivium* (Grammar, Logic and Rhetoric) and *Quadrivium* (Arithmetic, Music, Geometry and Astronomy).

It may be observed here, as has already been alluded to earlier, that the division between different branches of knowledge, between theory and practice, was not pushed to an extreme extent in the early ages. *Praxis*, for example, was recognized as the prime *techne*. The Greek word, *technologia* stood for systematic treatment, for example, of Grammar. *Praxis* is not the mere application of *theoria*, unified vision or integral outlook, but it also stands for the active impetus and base of knowledge. In India, one often uses the terms *Prayukti-vidyā* and *Prayodyogika-vidyā* to emphasize the practical or applicative character of knowledge. *Prayoga* or application is both the test and base of knowledge. Doing is the best way of knowing and learning.

That one and the same word may mean different 'things' or concepts in different cultures and thus create confusion has already been stated before. Two such words which in the context of this Project under discussion deserve special mention are *dharma* and *itihāsa*. Ordinarily, *dharma* in Sanskrit-rooted languages is taken to be conceptual equivalent of the English word *religion*. But, while the meaning of religion is primarily theological, that of *dharma* seems to be manifold. Literally, *dharma* stands for that which is established or that which holds people steadfastly together. Its other meanings are law, rule, usage, practice, custom, ordinance and statute. Spiritual or moral merit, virtue, righteousness and good works are also denoted by it. Further, *dharma* stands for natural qualities like burning (of fire), liquidity (of water) and fragility (of glass). Thus one finds that meanings of *dharma* are of many types – legal, social, moral, religious or spiritual, and even ontological or physical. All these meanings of *dharma* have received due attention of the writers in the relevant contexts of different volumes.

This Project, being primarily historical as it is, has naturally paid serious attention to the different concepts of history – epic mythic, artistic narrative, scientific-causal, theoretical and ideological. Perhaps the point that must be mentioned first about history is that it is not a correct translation of the Sanskrit word *itihāsa*. Etymologically, it means what really happened (*iti-ha-āsa*). But, as we know, in the Indian tradition *purāṇa* (legend, myth, tale, etc.), *gāthā* (ballad), *itivṛtta* (description of past occurrence, event, etc.), *ākhyāyikā* (short narrative) and *vaṁśa-carita* (genealogy) have been consciously accorded a very important place. Things started changing with the passage of time and particularly after the effective presence of Islamic culture in India. Islamic historians, because of their own cultural moorings and the influence of the Semitic and Graeco-Roman cultures on them, were more particular about their facts, figures and dates than their Indian predecessors. Their aim to bring history close to statecraft, social conditions and the lives and teachings of the religious leaders imparted a mundane character to this branch of learning. The Europeans whose political appearance on the Indian scene became quite perceptible only towards the end of the eighteenth century brought in with them their own view of historiography in their cultural baggage. The impact of the Newtonian Revolution in the field of history was very faithfully worked out, among others, by David Hume (1711–76) in *History of Great Britain from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution of 1688* (6 Vol. 1754–62) and Edward Gibbon (1737–94) in *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (6 Vol., 1776–88). Their emphasis on the principles of causality, datability and continuity/linearity of historical events introduced the spirit of scientific revolution in European historiography. The introduction of English education in India and the exposure of the elites of the country to it largely account for the decline of the traditional concept of *itihāsa* and the rise of the post-Newtonian scientific historiography. Gradually, Indian writers of our own history and cultural heritage started using more and more European concepts and categories. This is not to suggest that the impact of the European historiography on Indian historians was entirely negative. On the contrary, it imparted an analytical and critical temper which motivated many Indian historians of the nineteenth century to try to discover and represent our heritage in a new way.

VI

The principles which have been followed for organizing the subjects of different volumes under this Project may be stated in this way. We have kept in view the main structures which are discernible in the decomposible composition of the world. The first structure may be described as physical and chemical. The second structure consists, broadly speaking, of biology, psychology and epistemology. The highest and the most abstract structure nests many substructures within it, for example, logic, mathematics and musical notes. It is well known that the substructures within each structure are interactive, i.e., not isolable. The more important point to be noted in this connection is that the basic three structures of the world, viz., (a) physico-chemical, (b) bio-psychological, and (c) logico-mathematical are all simultaneously open to upward and downward causation. In other words, while the physico-chemical structure can causally influence the bio-psychological one and the latter can causally influence the most abstract logico-mathematical, the reverse process of causation is also operative in the world. In spite of its relative abstractness and durability, the logico-mathematical world has its downward causal impact on our bio-psychological and epistemological processes and products. And the latter can also bring about change in the structures of the physical world and its chemical composition. Applied physics and bio-technology make the last point abundantly clear.

Many philosophers, life-scientists, and social scientists highlight the point that nature loves hierarchies. Herbert Simon, the economist and the management scientist, speaks of four steps of partial ordering of our world, namely; (i) chemical substances, (ii) living organisms, tissues and organs, (iii) genes, chromosomes and DNA, and (iv) human beings, the social organizations, programmes and information process. All these views are in accord with the anti-reductionist character of our Project. Many biologists defend this approach by pointing out that certain characteristics of biological phenomena and process like unpredictability, randomness, uniqueness, magnitude of stochastic perturbations, complexity and emergence cannot be reduced without recource to physical laws.

The main subjects dealt with in different volumes of the Project are connected not only conceptually and synchronically but also historically or diachronically. For pressing practical reasons, however, we did not aim at presenting the prehistorical, proto-historical and historical past of India in a continuous or chronological manner. Besides, it has been shown in the presentation of the PHISPC that the process of history is non-linear. And this process is to be understood in terms of human praxis and an absence of general laws in history. Another point which deserves special mention is that the editorial advisors have taken a conscious decision not to make this historical Project primarily political. We felt that this area of history has always been receiving extensive attention. Therefore, the customary discussion of dynastic rule and succession will not be found in a prominent way in this series. Instead, as said before, most of the available space has been given to social, scientific, philosophical and other cultural aspects of Indian civilization.

Having stated this, it must be admitted that our departure from conventional style of writing Indian history is not total. We have followed an inarticulate framework of time in organizing and presenting the results of our studies. The first volume, together with its parts, deals with the prehistorical period to A.D. 300. The next two volumes, together with their parts, deal with, among other things, the development of social and political institutions and philosophical and scientific ideas from A.D. 300 to the beginning of the eleventh century A.D. The next period with which this Project is concerned spans from the twelfth century to the early part of the eighteenth century. The last three centuries constitute the fourth period covered by this Project. But, as said before, the definition of all these periods by their very nature are inexact and merely indicative.

Two other points must be mentioned before I conclude this General Introduction to the series. The history of some of the subjects like religion, language and literature, philosophy, science and technology cannot for obvious reason be squeezed within the cramped space of the periodic moulds. Attempts to do so result in thematic distortion. Therefore, the reader will often see the overflow of some ideas from one period to another. I have already drawn attention to this tricky and fuzzy as also the misleading aspects of the periodization of history, if pressed beyond a point.

Secondly, strictly speaking, history knows no end. Every age rewrites its history. Every generation, beset with new issues, problems and questions, looks back to its history and reinterprets and renews its past. This shows why history is not only contemporaneous but also futural. Human life actually knows no separative wall between its past, present and future. Its cognitive enterprises, moral endeavours and practical activities are informed of the past, oriented by the present and addressed to the future. This process persists, consciously or unconsciously, wittingly or unwittingly. In the narrative of this Project, we have tried to represent this complex and fascinating story of Indian civilization.

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D.P. Chattopadhyaya
General Editor

Introduction

As women we may mothers be
Also wives we may,
But as women we claim our place
As women to have our say.
Kamini Roy (b.1864)[1]

This volume, a part of the Project of History of Indian Science, Philosophy and Culture, situates women in Indian colonial and post-colonial history.[2] It investigates different aspects of their lives, their struggles, their works, their contributions, their dreams and their politics during the colonial and post-colonial periods.[3] In the process, it critically examines some of the notions and "facts" of our received knowledge. The investigation does not presume to be exhaustive, but touches upon issues that are central to the lives of women. The broad sweep of over two centuries, the intricate interplay of historical forces, the magnitude of the complexities involved, as well as the constraints of space, allow us to highlight only a few of the major issues. Thirty contributors, drawn from diverse disciplines and located in different parts of India, have chosen themes that are crucial to the understanding and experience of gender in India. The social contexts and the approaches of their scholarship are quite diverse, yet there is a leitmotif which links them together. To quote Wittgenstein, '…the strength of the fiber does not reside in the fact that some one fiber runs through its whole length, but in the overlapping of many fibers'.[4] The rich tapestry woven with multiple fibers reveals and reclaims some of the realities and experiences of women's lives and worlds in India during the past two hundred and fifty years. In doing so, it adds to our historical knowledge and also, it is hoped, partly changes our vision of Indian history.

Women cannot be studied in isolation. To understand women, we have to understand men; to comprehend the meaning and the implications, visible and invisible, of femininity, we have to comprehend those of masculinity and to historicize women we have to explore the fluxes in the relationship between the sexes. In other words, we have to understand how the complex process of 'gender' works – 'gender' being 'the social organization of the relationship between the sexes'.[5] As I have elsewhere argued, gender informs every aspect of a man's as well as a woman's existence.[6] Its multiple manifestations are shaped by the overall historical forces of the time as well as local specificities, such that any meaningful exploration of the gendered ordering of society must necessarily entail a combination of different levels of analysis.

It is now well established that race/caste, class and gender are mutually determining forces and operative on one another. Sometimes they act in coalition with each other, sometimes in opposition, varying by historical context.[7] Historian Joan Wallach Scott argues that 'inequalities of power are organized along at least three axes' – class, race and gender.[8] In addition to these three, in the Indian context, caste is a crucial determinant of power or powerlessness. Indeed, the intersection of caste and gender, in India, is a powerful predictor of women's place, knowledge, voice, work, role and relationships. Crucial in the history of colonial and post-colonial India is the commanding role that religious agencies have come to play to incite a majority/minority power divide among communities. There is also the need to take into account, depending on the issue and historical moment, social factors such as, ethnicity, state, nation, nationalism, colonialism and even age. We have 'to be able to think of gender difference as both structuring and being structured by the wide set of social relations'.[9]

Furthermore, the term 'women', present in the title of this volume, is itself problematic. If gender difference is implicated in other forms of social relations, as we have postulated above, how can 'women' form one category? Can women of all regions, religions or social or economic status share exactly the same problems? After many debates over such questions, it is now generally recognized that women are far from being a homogeneous category. This point was poignantly raised over a century and half ago by freed slave Sojourner Truth, in the United States of America, at the Akron Convention in 1851. When only white, upper class women were discussing women's problems, without any perception of the stubborn harshness of lower class black women's life, and when they referred to women's natural physical weakness, Sojourner was reputed to have asked, 'Ain't I a woman?' She certainly was, yet her concerns were far different from those of the white upper class female leadership, in terms of both class and race. The same question may be posed by a *Dalit* female construction worker before the upper class upper caste Indian women working in soft-jobs. Recognizing this 'difference' has been made an important analytical category for the study of women and women's movement.

Turning to the period chosen for this study, we perceive that in the Indian context 'politics', in the traditional meaning of the term, became inextricably intermingled with class, caste and gender. Historically the period coincides with the end of one era and the beginning of another, with two hundred years of British colonial rule and, following that, fifty years of an independent India. For our purpose, three major points – each revealing the intimate connection between politics, gender, class and caste – are noteworthy. First, a number of scholars, men and women, have argued that the 'woman question' was the chosen site for the cultural confrontation between the colonial British rulers and the colonized Indians.[10] And in the process of the conflict, upper caste/upper/middle class women were further distanced from their counterparts of the lower order. Second, the anti-colonial struggle impacted on women in a way not foreseen by contemporaries. Women from all classes left their homes to participate in large numbers in the nationalist movement, thus breaking the monopoly of politics by one gender, the male. To this experience we can locate the beginning of the women's movement in India.[11] Third, despite the constitutional guarantee of legal and constitutional equality of men and women in the post-colonial period, gender inequalities, most hidden, some visible, persist, and are compounded by class and caste hierarchies, and sometimes by state interventions. The Indian women's movement aims to correct the gender imbalance, and in the process attempts to grapple with the 'wide set' of hierarchical 'social relations'.

The present collection of essays follows this general framework. The essays have been divided into six sections: Family/Law, Body/Sexuality, Knowledge System, Work, Creativity/Voices and Politics. It should be emphasized that this arrangement is only a convenient organizational device. The demarcation is artificial. If family is not politics, if body is not politics – the two key issues in the women's movement of today – how can the women's movement be politics? If work is not for family, what is its purpose (apart from personal satisfaction for a miniscule few)? Further, the relationship between legitimate knowledge, dominant power structures and law is arguably a circular one. Certainly, voices can be articulated and heard best when permitted by the governing mores. Yet, they can also be detected, though less audibly, when not so permitted. Politics is, in our view, an all encompassing term pertaining to the formation of the gendered ordering of society as well as the compliance with and challenges towards the order. It is the politics of power that maintains the social hierarchies – of class, caste, gender and state. The manoeuvres of power dictate rules of conformism in sexuality; the strategies of power prescribe behavioural norms and sex-based roles for men and women; the game of power plans representations of masculinity and femininity and the aim of power is to maintain itself and to perpetuate social inequalities. Gender, then, is fundamentally about power. And if it is about power, it is about politics. The essays in this volume explore the operation of power and the resistance to it, the space that was denied to the disadvantaged gender – women – and the space they created for themselves, and the history of the mutual roles of women and men in colonial and post-colonial India.

I. FAMILY/LAW

The first section looks at how personal laws shape, structure and affect women's interests. Personal laws in India are based on religion and they define and regulate relationships in the family – marriage, divorce, custody, adoption, inheritance and property. Several scholars have written about personal laws in the past decade[12] and on the debate over the Uniform Civil Code.[13] In this volume, therefore, we choose to focus on the colonial laws which, even if modified, still govern us in spirit, and on the relationship between laws and Hindu kinship organizations. The interaction between law and kinship networks among other communities is not discussed here. But we do try to locate here the interior terrain of gender inequality – the family.

In the opening essay of this volume, Flavia Agnes analyses the process of moulding family laws of various communities in colonial India. The hundred years from 1850 to 1950, which mark the nation's struggle for independence, are also the years in which the edifice of personal laws was erected. Using case law, Agnes traces the history of Hindu women's right to separate property and of how this right was throttled. She also examines the political motive beneath the various statutes affecting rights of Muslim women during this period. More importantly, Agnes makes a detailed analysis of the personal laws of two minority communities, the Parsis and the Christians. Usually in the discourse on personal laws, which is confined to the binaries of Hindu majority and Muslim minority, the personal laws of these two communities tend to get submerged. Agnes argues that the laws of these communities set the trend for all personal laws in the country, and influenced judicial pronouncements as well as statutory reforms of both the Hindus and the Muslims. With the introduction of matrimonial statutes for Christians and Parsis, English legal principles were introduced within the Indian jurisprudence. These principles gradually influenced even the 'personal laws' of Hindus and Muslims – initially left to be governed by 'native' jurisprudence – and remoulded them along the lines of English statutes. The anti-women bias and the norms of Victorian prudery were elevated into rigid legal principles of Indian family laws. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Agnes contends, women's rights became a highly contested issue within the discourse of national identity. The growing antagonism between the Hindu and the Muslim communities within the nationalist movement also rendered the project of evolving uniform family laws an impossible vision. In the years immediately preceding independence, the mandate on equality provided the necessary backdrop for establishing perfect gender equality for all communities in terms of personal laws. But the debates in the Constituent Assembly were coloured by political concerns, and although after independence several acts have been passed,[14] the issue of women's rights still remains to be renegotiated.

Patricia Uberoi continues the argument in the context of post-colonial India, while situating it within the framework of Hindu kinship networks. She contends that excepting pockets of matrilineal kinship in the south-west and north-east of the Indian subcontinent, Hindu kinship organization predominantly follows the rule of patrilineal succession and inheritance. Contemporary Indian feminists, too, have divined the roots of women's oppression in the 'patriarchal' ideology of the traditional family. On the other hand, beginning with Lewis Henry Morgan, generations of scholars have pointed to fundamental, systemic differences in Indian kinship organization between North Indian ('Aryan') and South Indian ('Dravidian') kinship, notwithstanding the general rule of patrilineal succession. These differences, which are focused on variant rules of marriage, correlate with well-articulated differences in a range of factors that are believed to bear upon the question of female autonomy and well-being. According to Uberoi, as a result of a hundred years of social reform, post-independence India has seen the institution of a series of new laws governing marriage, succession, adoption and maintenance. Both the Special Marriage Act (1954) and the Hindu Marriage Act (1955) expressly de-legitimized Dravidian marriage practices while simultaneously (and contradictorily) allowing their retention as 'custom'. Uberoi elaborates on the politics of this gesture, in which hierarchies of kinship and gender were intermeshed. Indeed, according to feminist scholars, a close scrutiny of the Special Marriage Act, the Hindu Marriage Act as well as the Hindu Succession Act – avowedly directed at improving the social and economic position of women – would indicate that they failed to serve the purpose. They proposed to give certain rights to women, and indeed gave some rights in law, but they were riddled with contradictions.

Because of the in-built loopholes intrinsic to the laws, and the structural constraints on their implementation, they remain virtually empty for the masses of women, except only a few.

A core site of gender inequality which mirrors itself in various legal and kinship arrangements, and indeed in every zone of life, is the area covered by the broad term 'family'. Here the earliest socializations are engineered, the first division of labour designed and notions of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' framed at the outset. An individual's birth, education, marriage, work and death are intricately connected with it. Zoya Hasan and Ritu Menon draw attention to the institution of marriage, so central to most women's lives, and a primary source of inequities in family relationships. Focusing primarily on Muslim women, the authors' detailed survey shows how Hindu and Muslim women are almost equally balanced in terms of marital status. They marry once or twice, they are divorced, they are widowed – in short, in contradistinction to circulating myths, women's marriage patterns are the same among all communities. Neither Hindus nor Muslims, however, constitute a monolithic unit. While one has to be cautious about over-generalization, certain trends are discernible in the marital status of women in both communities. Hasan and Menon conclude that marriage under patriarchy is not advantageous for women. Feminists have not been able to provide an alternative to the family, either in terms of emotional sustenance or security, and so the institution survives, with a few modifications, awaiting a much needed radical transformation.

Gopal Guru examines the familial and political identity of women among the Dalit community in Maharashtra. He argues that patriarchy is as exploitative and overbearing among the dalits as among any other community in India. The sex ratio is adverse against women, dowry is rampant and wife-beating is common. Although in recent years, there is some evidence of Dalit women, especially among the Mahar caste, trying to carve out a positive identity for themselves, the endeavour still lacks a political dimension. In fact, Dalit feminist politics in Maharashtra operates under the political shadow of male Dalit politics.

II. BODY/SEXUALITY/EMOTIONS

Women's bodies have been the site of major polemics on gender. While they have been, historically, loaded with signification, three notions obstinately persist in the context of India. First, women's bodies are for procreation, second, women's bodies are for men's enjoyment, and thus sexual agency on the part of women threatens the social order, and third women's bodies are the repositories of men's honour, linked to the honour/shame of the community and the nation. The act of procreation is so self-evident that it is not possible to deny that women's bodies reproduce the human species. There have been attempts in various societies in various ages to deny women this subjectivity through the use of religious rituals, trying to use "culture" to trump "nature".[15] The Hindu *upanayan* and the Christian 'baptism' are but two examples. Nevertheless, the visible feat of giving birth to a child and feeding and nurturing it endows on women the status of motherhood, both physically and culturally. The notion of motherhood was extolled, elevated and politically used, in theory as well as in practice, with the advent of nationalism in late nineteenth century India.[16] The child came to acquire centrestage, and advice to mothers regarding child-birth and child-care poured in.[17] This advice, limited to middle class women, was not accompanied by serious policy actions.

In the post-independence era, however, development strategies did create policy around mothering and reproduction, and 'emphasized planning of commodity sectors' at the cost of planning of social sectors. Health was the first casualty. Monica Das Gupta and Lincoln Chen postulate that India today is faced with three kinds of health hazards, troubles associated with underdevelopment (among the poor and the disadvantaged), diseases of affluence (among the few urban rich) and new environmental and behavioural threats (among all people). Women are the worst sufferers under each group. While women of the upper income urban group also have less medical care than their men, the state of indigent urban and rural females convincingly confirms the thesis that health and poverty 'share a synergistic and bi-directional relationship'. Poverty exacerbates ill-health, and ill-health diminishes productivity and causes poverty.[18] For impoverished women, illiteracy, malnutrition, overwork, heavy manual work (as in mining or construction), the double load both at home and outside, lack of access to medical facilities, non-availability of safe contraception and repeated abortions under unsafe conditions combine to take a toll on their constitution. Over and above this, the issue of women's health is linked to their secondary status in society as reflected in the 'neglect of their own bodies and a curious kind of self-exploitation'.[19] Consequently, despite women's health being a declared concern of successive Governments[20] – the stark realities of their appalling health condition are authenticated by the Human Development Reports and the demographic curves.

Leela Visaria directly addresses the issue of women's health and the demographic imbalance in India. The sex ratio of women vis-à-vis men is adverse in India, whereas in most countries of the world women outnumber men by as much as 3 to 5%. Reminding us of Amartya Sen's reference to the missing millions of women in the country, Visaria analyses the magnitude and the implications of the deficit, the regional variations and the implicit threats for women in such a situation. She indicates how the 'masculinity ratio' has increased at a faster rate than that of the population and observes that the major factor responsible for the deficit of women is their excess mortality, notwithstanding the fact that life expectancy at birth has increased at a faster rate for females than for males. What is being done about human intervention that is altering the sex ratio at birth itself? Why is the masculinity ratio higher in the 7+ age population than in the all-ages ratio? A variety of factors operates and causes the neglect of the girl child and the devaluation of a woman from the moment she is born, through education and employment, up to the last day of her life.

Fears about women's pleasure in their own bodies exist in many societies. In many, women are actively prevented from acquiring sexual agency, while their bodies continue to be considered the property of their men and their communities. Male sexuality is accommodated either through the socially approved institution of marriage, or through brothels (often sanctioned by law). The first is considered necessary for establishing fatherhood, and the second is an outlet for unsatiated male desire. If male sexuality at any point jeopardizes family solidarity or social cohesion, societies diagnose the problem as women's deficiency (physically frigid female bodies) or the lure of prostitutes (physically alluring female bodies), but does not recognize male sexuality as posing the threat (as it does for female sexuality). An essay on prostitution would have buttressed this point; unfortunately we have not been able to include one in this volume.[21] We would like to assert briefly, that while women's bodies are sites for masculinity and male virility, women's sexuality is always a suspect. The belief is that sexually aggressive women are temptresses, and that women's unbridled sexuality may lead to social anarchy. Various powerful images of women, goddess, *grihalakshmi, pativrata* (physically and mentally chaste) *bhadramahila* (educated middle class/upper caste women), dutiful and self-effacing, passive and docile, without sexual desire but procreating for the family circulate so that women's consent to the lack of sexual agency is effectively procured.[22]

Prem Chowdhry explores the oral tradition of women of rural north India that subverts the stereotype of the idyllic *grihalakshmi*, and offers an alternative image of women. Chowdhry focuses on the articulation of women's sexuality as it emerges out of women's songs produced collectively by women, sung by women for an audience consisting purely of women. She argues that women's celebration of their sexuality and self-projection of a lustful image through their songs present an alternative moral perspective on kinship, gender, sexuality and norms of behaviour. Why does the 'lustful' image of women, common to the songs of both men and women, have different connotations and messages for the two sexes? How far is this image consistent with women's self-understanding and self-evaluation, desires and fantasies? And, most importantly, to what extent does it coincide with their life experiences? Do the subversiveness of these songs find echo in the actual transgressive behaviour of women? If so, with what effect? Chowdhry dexterously explores these questions against the backdrop of the social context of power relations and status considerations prevalent within the family, caste and class. In doing so, she highlights the feminine construction of masculinity, conjugality, pleasure and deprivation that cuts across multiple networks of social hierarchies.[23] The inevitable conflict within a world-view where different and contradictory beliefs and desires co-exist brings to the fore the interface between ideology and practice, dominance and resistance, patriarchy and deviations and the politics of power.

G. Arunima's search is for human emotions – love, sexuality, marriage, friendship – and social relations emanating from them. Inevitably, she turns to literature as the richest source available for such an enquiry. In exploring the ideas of friendship and love in Kerala, across the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, she examines men's writings as well as women's writings, especially women's autobiographies, an important source for understanding emotions. The demands of a friend and a lover are often the same, truth, constancy and fidelity, but in the Malayali novels authored by men – Arunima's chosen fields of enquiry – there is no necessary interdependence between the two. However, the two twentieth century autobiographies – *Vyazhavatta Smaranakal*, by B. Kalyani Amma and *Ivan entte priya C.J.*, by Rosie Thomas – dwell on conjugal relations and reveal women's innermost thoughts on love, based on deep friendship and mutual understanding, and physical attraction. We know that the idea of friendship as a necessary accompaniment of love had become important in such diverse social contexts as Victorian England as well as colonial India–there is a huge literature on the subject.[24] Kalyani

Amma's and Rosie Thomas's autobiographies raise interesting issues from that perspective, and in doing so, bring up methodological points concerning women's writings about their own lives and selves.

Violence on women, visible and invisible, has been a key issue within the contemporary women's movement.[25] Through domestic violence, the killing of the female child or foetus, rape, or dowry death, women's bodies have been the site for multiple displays of male violence. In India, this exploitation takes a more naked form when the victim comes from a lower class or caste. Gang rapes of women due to family rivalries, property disputes, for financial bargains, and in the name of religion, are quotidian occurrences. In times of war, men of the winning group rape women of the vanquished. The infliction of violence on women is a particular punishment because Indian men, Hindu, Muslim or Sikh, consider that on women's chastity depends men's honour. 'Power rape', the raping of women to demonstrate and defeat rival men or communities is significant because the rape of a woman is akin to the rape of the community to which she belongs.[26] The violence and molestation that women suffered during the partition of colonial India into independent states of India and Pakistan have been powerfully documented by Urvashi Butalia[27] and Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin[28]. There has been a noted increase in family violence, especially after globalization. According to recent research, structural adjustment policies have led to the unemployment of a large number of men, has heightened men's frustration, tension and fear of job insecurity, and women are made to pay the social cost.[29] Crime records[30] indicate an upward trend in rape, dowry deaths, torture, molestation and sexual harassments. This is despite the fact that most cases are not reported.

Despite the voluminous writing on violence against women, there is little that can help us theoretically understand the specific nature of this violence in India. In this volume, Kumkum Sangari draws connections between different forms of violence prevalent in India (such as caste or communal violence), and argues that whether in the case of Sati, or domestic violence or caste conflict or communal violence, it is women who are the targeted victims under patriarchy. Indeed, the State, patriarchy and forces of the fundamentalist right, are often in league with one another in acts of violence against women.

III. KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS

The nineteenth century social reforms introduced education for Hindu women, deprived of that right since a very long time. Scholars have argued that though men such as Rammohan Roy and Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar took the initiative in this arena, the emerging middle class males supported them not to make women equal partners in the family or public life. The purpose was to make women better equipped to fulfil their conventional roles as wives and mothers in the colonial setting.[31] According to this analysis, in order to counter the critique of Indian civilization by the colonial rulers, the educated Hindu middle class on the one hand introduced some reforms, including the education of women, and on the other hand, designed a 'glorious' Indian past, and prescribed role-models for contemporary women.[32] The model was moulded on upper caste, upper class Aryan women, and the numerous serving women of the lower caste/class were forgotten,[33] indicating a sharp class/caste divide in the 'woman's question'. Mrinalini Sinha remarks, 'The re-articulation of middle class Indian womanhood had been necessary for the emergence of a new middle class public/private sphere in colonial India'.[34]

The same considerations provided the impetus for the education of Muslim women during the colonial period. Like their Hindu-Brahmo counterparts, the new generation of Western-educated Muslim men also turned to a 'glorious' past age, the pristine days of early Islam, and focused attention on the education of women.[35] The projected model woman, chaste, rational and pious, was extolled as a 'heavenly gem'.[36] The Muslim middle class hoped that women, when educated, would become better companions to their husbands, assist in their upward social mobility and be better equipped to bring up their children in the true spirit of Islam.[37] In other words, the education for Muslim women, as for their Hindu sisters, reconstituted the site of patriarchy.

It was the concerns of the middle class that oriented women's education in independent India as well. There is a declared policy for education of all women, especially literacy for all, and there has been some improvement in the rates of literacy and enrolment, but the basic educational structure is meant to serve the middle class. Aparna Basu gives a brief overview of women's education over a period of 150 years. She traces Government policies, both in colonial and in post-colonial periods, as enunciated in various Education Commission reports, Five Year plans, National policy on Education and Literacy Programmes. She argues that there has been considerable progress in women's education, and enrolment at the primary as well as at higher institutions for formal and informal learning has gone up. Yet the key question that arises is: why are 45% of Indian women still illiterate today as against 25% male illiteracy?[38] The inescapable conclusion is that the contents and methods of education have neither an appeal nor any relevance to the socially and economically disadvantaged. Placed in our theoretical framework, education cannot be seen in isolation. It is one part of the complex social fabric and is directed by the dominant power hierarchies, boys/men being prioritized over girls/women, upper caste/ upper class over lower caste/lower class student population.

This is confirmed by Anil Gupta and R. A. Mashelkar in their joint investigation of the station of women in the sphere of science, which is considered to be the most prized 'modern' site of learning. Their study reveals that although women have excelled in many branches of pure science during the last decade, they are highly under-represented in medicine and technology. Women comprise about 90% of the graduates in pure science but only 8% of the graduates in medicine and 3% of those in technology. They are grossly under-represented in technical jobs or at the highest echelons of medical science, although as nurses they dominate the profession. While Gupta and Mashelkar try to pinpoint the reasons for this 'absence' in formal science, they discern through their field study the presence of a good number of women engaged in what they describe as 'informal science'. Women's socialized familiarity with nature and their know how accumulated through everyday activities make them significant contributors in the field. Their innovative ways of cooking and utilization of lesser known biodiversity to meet nutritional needs in periods of stress, famine or flood, their ingenious methods of selecting seeds and storing agricultural produce have not been recorded or duly appreciated. But if here, in 'informal science', too, they are overshadowed by the more visible presence of men, the reasons lie in the socially sanctioned division of labour. The two authors, scientists themselves, conclude by proposing strategies for, to use the terms coined by them, 'feminizing science'.

In the quest of informal science and unorganized knowledge, we turn the searchlight more closely on the critical area of women and environment. Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha in their rich and important work, *This Fissured Land,* affirmed that historians of modern India had been 'indifferent to the ecological consequences of British intervention' and showed a 'surprising unawareness' of how the country's encounter with a technologically advanced culture had led to profound dislocation at various levels of the indigenous society. Indeed, the study of 'changing human interactions with living resources' is of paramount importance because of the essential interdependence of ecological and social changes, and because our country seems to be 'living on borrowed time', eating at an accelerated rate into 'the capital stock of its renewable resources of soil water, plant and animal life'.[39] There is also another political angle to the subject. India is one of the seven-mega biodiversity countries in the world – with at least 45,000 known species of wild plants and 81,000 known species of wild animals. There are numerous unknown species, innumerable varieties of grains, fruits and plants in unfrequented forests and mountains. That is why India has become a main target of biopiracy from the West. This new form of invasion is not of land, but of the genetic materials that thrive in it, and of the knowledge system that people here have developed. Since we do not possess any comprehensive information about our natural wealth or about the existing patterns of knowledge, it is imperative that these be investigated for the preservation of the resources of the nation. Moreover, women are – as Gupta and Mashelkar have also briefly indicated – a storehouse of various forms of indigenous knowledge, especially concerning food and home-made recipes for treatment of common ailments. This knowledge is orally transmitted from generation to generation. There has been no cataloguing, no inventory, no analysis, and even no thorough enquiry of the nature, extent and usefulness of this knowledge.

It is in this context, that Jayshree Vencatesan, R.J. Ranjit Daniels and Madhav Gadgil's study of tribal women in the Kolli Hills in south India, investigates local knowledge-sources about plants, animals and birds of the region. They discover the extent of that knowledge and, in the process, also probe the differences in the nature of women's knowledge from that of men. Women are more interested in the primary requisites of everyday life. They are more concerned with the animals that feed the family, the plants that yield both food and medicine, and the birds that have medicinal value. And yet, women have but little say in the governing of local administrative bodies. Although tribal women in the Koli Hills, like most other tribal women, are freer in movements and social interactions than their urban middle class counterparts, their position is no better in the structures of power. The unstated argument of the authors is that the way to safeguard traditional knowledge system from exploitative development processes of the West is by empowering women and recognizing the legitimacy of their knowledge.

IV. WORK

Feminist explorations into women's work has shown that women in all spheres of work are discriminated against vis-à-vis men in terms of access to resources (especially land rights[40] and credit[41]), and availability of training.This discrimination is further aggravated by the national and international drive towards 'globalization', 'liberalization' and 'privatization'. The new technologies are bypassing women, and part-time, casual or 'unskilled' work is still the only option open to them.[42] Add to this the lower degree of union organization, and the unchanging 'tradition' of domestic responsibilities that create for men and women labourers a differential work mapping within the constraints (for both) of a semi-feudal, semi-capitalist economy of a 'developing' country. Kamini Roy's words in the opening quote of this essay echoed the hopes and the sentiments of the 'new woman', newly educated and privileged in the upper strata of society. It is difficult to imagine that the multitudes of indigent women have shared these feelings ever, or participate in the celebration of womanhood even today.

Agriculture is the occupation of the large majority of female workers in India. According to the Census of 2001, out of 111 million women workers in rural India, 89 million were working in agriculture. The Indian economy shows a double trend – the simultaneous feminization of the agricultural labour force and the casualization of the rural working force.[43] Data based on NSSO and Government of India's Economic Survey indicate that in rural areas both self-employment of women and their regular employment have declined and casual labour has increased. Simultaneously in urban areas gender-based wage differentials have widened among regular wage/salaried workers.[44] Bahnisikha Ghosh's time allocation study in rural Bengal has shown how the introduction of high yielding varieties (HYV), fertilizers and mechanization has displaced women as cultivators in the fields, turning them into waged/casual labourers and simultaneously has increased their daily working hours.[45] This study is confirmed by Indira Hirway's larger and later study of selected states in India.[46]

In this volume Smita Jassal's recent fieldwork evidence from eastern U.P. points to significant gender differentials in access to land and resources. Recognizing that the colonial interventions in land rights had adversely affected women, Jassal asserts, today's gender differentials are a consequence of post-independence development paradigms. These differentials are most evident in three areas – the control of agricultural technologies, the obstructions in recording women's shares in the state's land redistribution schemes and institutional resistance to providing women with credit. Issues of minimum wage and gender parity in agrarian wage structures take on greater significance as women in India are adversely affected by structural adjustments. Furthermore, female agricultural labourers in the lower rungs of agrarian caste and class hierarchies increasingly bear the severest brunt of discrimination in access to training and opportunities for employment. This is not to suggest that male labourers do not suffer from the new forces dominating the market economy, but to say that women are more disadvantaged than men. In fact, Jassal's fieldwork reveals that while women become 'tied' to a variety of labour and lease agreements, this facilitates comparatively more favourable conditions for men, although within a field restricted for both. Jassal argues for a gendered understanding of agrarian issues as a step towards a search for creative solutions and egalitarian forms of social relations in the countryside.

While Jassal scrutinizes agriculture, Sudha Deshpande turns her investigative lens to women's participation in non-farming sectors. She argues that the subordinate position at home gets translated into the inferior position women experience after they enter the labour market. Her empirical evidence testifies to the inequality women face in having access to jobs, in doing the kinds of work they do and in accepting wage discrimination in the labour market. Even when men and women work in the same industry, gender differentials are nurtured and what is branded as 'women's work' is invariably associated with inferior status and pay. In Deshpande's assessment, these inequities have been heightened in the post-reform era.

Nandita Gandhi and Nandita Shah's survey of 360 women workers – maps gender in two industries located in Mumbai – the plastics processing industry and the diamond polishing and jewellery manufacturing industry. Both of these have a high export potential, a chain of production units in the formal and informal sectors and a substantial number of women workers. The women are predominantly Marathi speaking, Hindus from the lower castes, settled on the outskirts of Mumbai in working class colonies, and are hired by the two industries as 'fresh' and cheap labour for unskilled jobs. New changes in the organizational structure and the production process are putting them increasingly in disadvantaged and insecure positions. They are being persuaded to take voluntary retirement, are unable to move when the plant relocates and are not selected for retraining in multi skilled jobs. Based on their data, Gandhi and Shah argue that employers do not employ women only because women are a cheap or flexible labour force. Women constitute a part of the employers' 'contingency' or back up plan of dividing and checkmating workers by a subtle juggling of gender, caste and region to balance skill, productivity, stability and wages. Given women's own limited objectives for employment, double burden and low level of skills, they are compelled to accept their allocation and position as 'contingent' workers and encounter flexibility strategies in the workplace without protest.

K.J. Joy and Suhas Paranjape focus on arguably the most difficult, yet the most crucial, concern of women's everyday lives – water. Women of all groups have special relationship with water deriving from their domestic responsibilities (cooking and washing). The authors concentrate on those who are the worst hit by water scarcity, that is, poor rural women and tribal women on whom falls the onerous responsibility of *finding and fetching* water for their domestic needs. That countless women have to walk for miles to get a few buckets/pots of water, at the cost of their health and time, from distant wells or ponds, is abundantly documented in official papers, creative literature, films and posters.[17] Because of this visible role, the bureaucratic platforms for action see women as instruments to achieve the officially declared water-goals, sidelining women's own needs and perspectives. There is also a tendency to treat women as an abstract homogeneous category in the discourse on women and water, and place technological developments beyond social and familial considerations. Further, women are conspicuous by their 'absence' in the discourse on water, except drinking water, because of the perceived dichotomy between 'domestic' and 'productive' water use. Joy and Paranjape mention the many initiatives at the local levels to promote women's activism in participatory irrigation management, drinking water projects and their mobilization for rights over use of water for productive as well as domestic purposes. The authors forcefully argue for a closer link between the larger women's movement and these grassroot level initiatives. The valuable experiences gathered by the latter remain isolated, if divorced from the women's movement. Similarly, the women's movement to be comprehensive needs to assimilate these experiences, theorize on them and accept an alternative approach to women-water discourse as part of a wider movement for a sustainable and equitable restructuring of natural resources.

Parama Roy looks at the other vital area, food. In India, a woman prepares food, serves the food, but is the last to eat it. This custom encapsulates the social reason for a woman's poor health (eating the left-over, stale food, eating less), along with cooking with fuel made of cattle dung and firewood. A woman gives food to her husband, children and other members of the family. A son, if hungry, comes to his mother, not father, and asks for food. Goddess Lakshmi, who is believed to preside over the home, carries in her hand a pot brimming with paddy seeds. Lakshmi and *grihalakshmi,* mother and food, are almost synonymous in the Indian Hindu psyche. It is in this framework that Roy analyses how and why the iconography of the Bengal famine of 1350/1943 is notable for its emphatically gendered character. Despite the fact that males (both adult and juvenile) died in slightly higher numbers than did women in this holocaust, literary depictions, journalistic accounts and newspaper photographs in the *Statesman* return repeatedly to certain stock images: the mother unable to breast-feed her child, the infant suckling at the breast of its dead mother, a woman selling, abandoning or destroying her child, the young rural woman enticed into prostitution in order to stave off the pangs of famine. Roy scrutinizes the significance of the figuration of famine as female in a number of texts, journalistic, anthropological, literary, economic, historical and cinematic; in doing so, she reads famine as a powerfully gendered phenomenon that illuminates the character of patronage, social welfare, social hierarchy and entitlement.

V. CREATIVITY/VOICES

Culture is certainly politics. Note, for instance, the demarcations between 'high' and 'low' culture, 'elite' and 'mass' culture, culture for the educated/rich and culture for the uneducated poor. And there are mainstream cultures enjoying the patronage of the powers that be, and other forms of culture that have been marginalized. Yet there is more to culture than politics. It is a space for self-expression, of self-realization and for portrayal of times and people. This is a realm where women have been able to create some room for themselves in literature, in music, in dancing, in theatre, in painting and sculpture and in all forms of what is known as 'folk culture.' They also were able to gain some recognition of their talent and contribution, though by far outweighed by men. It is not possible in this one volume to deal with various cultural forms. There has been much lively and informative research on women's dancing, their representations in the films[18] and television, the most powerful visual language of today. It is generally agreed that while the majority of the audio visual media portray the stereotypical role of women;

new images of women are also emerging through some of them. More meaningfully, women are appearing in positions of power as producers, directors and script writers in films, television productions and commercial theatre.[49] Their role in the *jatra* or folk-theatre remains relatively unexplored. However, in this volume, in this limited place, we have chosen to pick out only three areas: literature, theatre and visual arts and, among these three genres, only a few selected themes are under our spotlight.

Some women, educated during the colonial period, began to express themselves in writing. Initially most of the authors, especially the reputed ones, reiterated male and nationalist ideologies, confirming Deniz Kandiyoti's thesis that many women enter into a 'bargain' with patriarchy in order to gain and consolidate their places within it.[50] For most elite women, maintaining patriarchy was in their interest, but a handful of educated women ventured to question the patriarchal power-system. I have elsewhere mentioned that in Bengal the writings of not-too-well-known women in the late nineteenth century indicate a subtle resistance, which took a more concrete shape in the twentieth.[51] Malavika Karlekar's readings of autobiographies of women of this period also arrive at a similar conclusion.[52] Susie Tharu and K. Lalitha in their path-breaking work, *Women Writing in India*, volumes I and II, have collected numerous women's voices of protest through the ages. They have also historicized these writings and analysed, with admirable force and eloquence, Indian literary history from the perspective of women.

From my own readings of literature, I have singled out that voice which I consider to be the most original and the most courageous, placed against the backdrop of history and society. Early in the last century, Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain raised in an almost uncanny way, in an almost hostile situation, many of the critical questions that plague the women's movement even today. She challenged the Muslim system of patriarchy (directed against the Muslim but basically applicable to Hindu or any other system of patriarchy) and demanded gender equality in an unqualified form. She advocated for women's right to education, right to work and right to live a life of dignity. Significantly, she took a clear position against communal divides at a time of intensifying communal antagonisms. Certainly she had limitations. She evinced no awareness of class divides, addressed only the Muslim women of the upper/middle classes, made some compromises under pressure of circumstances, and looked at society as a binary opposition of men and women. Opposed by contemporary orthodox Mullas, and accorded but a grudging acknowledgement from contemporaries for her literary contributions, she is regarded today as one of the earliest feminists of colonial India.

As in literature, so in performing arts, women had a recognized position in India, whether as *tawayefs*, *bais*, *devadasis* or, later, as actresses and 'respected' *bhadramahila* artistes. Amlan Das Gupta reveals the transformations in women's participation in the world of North Indian music from the middle of the nineteenth century to the early decades of the post-Independence era. Focusing principally on vocal music, he briefly considers early accounts of women performers, and then moves on to a discussion of professional women singers. What role do women play in connection with the institutional loci of musical performance and dissemination: the radio, the recording companies and institutions for musical training? What is their specific relationship with *gharana*? And what motivated them to take up the highly contested profession? In exploring these questions, Das Gupta skillfully argues that women have played a very significant role in the performance and dissemination of classical music, but their position has always remained marginal to the idealized sites of musical consumption.

Anuradha Kapur's study of the theatre analyses the meaning of 'tradition', and addresses first two major paradigms – the popular theatre called the Company Theatre or the Parsi Theatre successful all over India between 1860 and 1930, and the Theatre of Roots which became important as an organizing principle through the late 1960s to the 1980s. Kapur then highlights the work of women directors, showing how the theatre made by some women directors of the 1990s attempts to undo the structures that held together the idea of a composite Indian identity. Through the device of female impersonators Kapur shows how gender 'essences' are undone through performance. The feminine becomes a masquerade, one of many possible masques to work out theatric desire and raises questions of inner and outer worlds, of gender and subjectivity, and of 'tradition' and 'modernity'.

Jyotindra Jain takes us to the realm of painting. He leaves aside the world of mainstream art and the works of reputed women artists, such as Amrita Shergil or Prabha Devi and introduces us to the unexplored domain of rural artists living outside the boundaries of city life, whose paintings show an exuberance of colour and vibrancy rarely to be found in other art forms. Three rural women, Gangabai, Sonabai and Neelmani Devi, become alive through their paintings. While presenting their work, Jain dwells on the importance of the art of rural women across different regions and communities in India and on the creativity, individuality and distinctiveness of these areas of artistic practice. Is there a special positioning and role of women artists within these folk art communities? To what extent have these positions been foregrounded in the recent institutionalized patronage and promotion of folk art practices, and how has this new focus and publicity intervened in the form and content of the productions? How do these village women artists, notwithstanding all their talent, stand apart from the parallel sphere of middle class women artists of urban India? In exploring these questions, Jain contextualizes the three 'outstanding' women artists from the field of folk art, and underwrites the need for making the folk and the village arts a central part of the contemporary Indian art canon.

Through her exploration of the art of Gujarati stepwells, which flourish under women's patronage, Jutta Jain-Neubauer, argues that in the making of the rich and varied traditions of Indian art and architecture, women have played a significant role both as patrons and as creators. In the written records, the contributions of women have been severely undermined. And yet, in most of the living traditions of professional Indian craft practices, women play a supportive role and almost all the traditions of domestic arts, which form a major part of the Indian artistic heritage, have been the female domain. Jain-Neubauer explodes the myth of exclusive male patronage of art, scrutinizes the making of stepwells and a few other monuments in Gujarat and, in the process, adds a new dimension to the history of art in India.

VII. POLITICS

In this section, politics has been taken in its traditional sense. A good number of books, written by women – from Manmohan Kaur, *Women in India's Freedom Struggle* (1985), to Radha Kumar's *A History of Doing*, to Raka Ray, *Fields of Protest: Women's Movements in India* (1999) and Nivedita Menon (ed.) *Women and Politics* (2000) deal with the issue of women and politics. Each author has his or her own perspective, and each looks at the field either with protest or co-operation from a particular ideological stance. None of them writes what would be termed as objective history; instead, they confirm the position that history writing is never, and can never be, neutral. The present volume does not lay any claim to neutrality, either. It presents three reputed women's studies scholar-activists to spotlight women in politics.

Tanika Sarkar tells the extraordinary tale of women and politics in colonial India, and gives what may be described as a 'new look' at the polemics of politicized women. She challenges the current historiography on the subject – 'all modern gender politics were assumed to be nationalist and patriarchal in equal measure, without internal variations, mutual contestations, temporal shifts, long-term transformations'. She questions the accepted theories of Gandhi's philosophy regarding women's relationship with politics, and also the *biplabi* and the Leftist male leadership's marginalization of women. She asserts that scholars, even feminist scholars, have so long interpreted the impact of the freedom movement on women. The real search should be for: what women did to the movement. With commendable skill, Sarkar shows how women manoeuvred and 'politically' manipulated the movement, sometimes changing its thrust, sometimes incorporating gender issues in the agenda and introducing the 'struggles for women's rights', which Sarkar designates as 'the dominant sign of our modernity'. However, feminists remained more closely aligned to Left-radical movements for rights and equality. Consequently, it was the ambivalences and compromises that occurred here within gender relations and understanding that preoccupied them in this sphere. They had no affiliation and little interest in rightwing movements, and thought relatively little about rightwing gender ideologies specifically. As a consequence, whereas emancipatory struggles – anti-colonial, civil rights, left – were problematized comprehensively, rightist movements did not receive either scrutiny or critical analysis.

The beginning of the women's movement in India must be dated back to the days of the freedom movement. But the present phase may be traced from the 1970s, when women started actively protesting against the inequities of the Indian state. The first new groups comprised women from Maoist movements in Hyderabad and Maharashtra. Simultaneously, women's demands for equality were 'given national legitimacy' by the Report of the Committee on the Status of Women published by the Government of India, in 1975. The women's movement really burgeoned in 1977. Raka Ray in her rich and important study, *Fields of Protest,* asserts that the women's movement today 'exists in highly decentralized form with hundreds of organizations in both urban and rural areas throughout the country, including the women's fronts of socialist and communist parties, independent trade-unions, women's wings of mass organizations…and smaller autonomous counselling centres and agitational groups'.[53] Together and singly, these various groups have agitated for women's rights, a life of dignity for *Dalit* women, Muslim women's maintenance after divorce, equal inheritance for Christian women, equal pay for equal work, maternity leaves and so on. At the same time, they have organized protests against domestic violence, rape, sexual assault, sati, forced prostitution of women and girl children, the negative portrayal of women in the media and so on. Not all the phases have been visible, nor all issues successful. But the emergence of women's studies as a serious field of scholarship since the 1970s with the women's movement and the linkages between the two are considered imperative for progress. A number of recent studies deal with the institutionalization of women's studies in India.[74] In this volume we focus on the women's movement in Andhra Pradesh, one of the sites of the beginning of the contemporary movement, and we conclude with an overview of the movement.

Vasanth Kannabiran and Kalpana Kannabiran document a number of significant struggles–including the Telengana movement and the anti-*arrack* uprising – in which Andhra women played an important part and where they were indubitably at the helm. The authors analyse the interplay of power, authority and patriarchal control in defining and limiting women's politics, even while initially encouraging and releasing their potential. Simultaneously they explore the multiple dimensions of women's historical exclusion from citizenship as defined in patriarchal terms. The story of women's citizenship claims, the impediments in their way, their praxis of citizenship and politics help us see the difference in the manner in which men and women perceived and acted upon issues of public concern. Women used the spaces that opened up in the public sphere to push forth their demands for progress and change in the private sphere, and in doing so, they learned to live that change, to transform their own lives in order for the change to be effected. Kannabiran and Kannabiran forcefully argue that it is this historical memory that must be kept alive to provide an organic link between the present and the public past. Historical memories ensure that the preservation of the past informs our understanding of the present and shapes our visions of the future. And the Andhra women's struggles for making history form an integral part of this continuum.

In the last essay of the volume, Gabriel Dietrich links the past and the present with the future. She gives a brief overview of the women's movement and examines some critical questions for the success of the movement. Touching on some key issues around which women's struggles have burgeoned, she goes on to analyse the doings of two different organizations, one in the urban locale and the other in the rural, both situated in down south Tamil Nadu. The experiences of the Pennurimal Iyakkam, a women's rights organization among slum dwellers and workers in the informal sector, and the Gram Swaraj Movement against intensive aquaculture provide meaningful insights into the complexities of the situation of those women who lie pegged to the bottom rung of the social ladder, the *Dalits*, the rural poor and the urban homeless. Dietrich contends that these battles must expand and build wider alliances. The class, caste factors have to be taken into account along with political pressures from alien powers, and a movement against gender discrimination must ally with other social movements against injustice. The three essays in this section authored by Sarkar, the Kannabirans and Dietrich, thus emphasize the intersectionality of class, religion, caste and gender oppression, strengthening the argument that women's movements that fail to take these intersections into account will inevitably be flawed, weak or in some cases, may have reactionary implications.

This collection of essays offers insights into women's lives in colonial and post-colonial India, fully cognizant of the complex interlinking of class, caste, ethnicity, religion, nation, state policy and gender. Taken as a whole, the essays raise our awareness of overt and hidden discriminations, and restricted options and limited possibilities for women's agency, while reminding us of the multiple ways in which women manage to survive and thrive despite familial, community and state neglect.

NOTES

1. Kamini Roy (1864–1933) was one of the first generation of educated Bengali women. She graduated from Calcutta University in 1885 and joined Bethune College as a teacher. A poet of eminence, she was also involved in politics and in the movement for women's right to vote. The quote is from her poem, *Thakurmar Chithi* (Letter from a Grandmother), which is an imaginary dialogue between a grandmother and her granddaughter. Translation from the original Bengali is by Sukhendu Ray.
2. Women have been marginalized in society as well as in history. Sheila Rowbotham pithily says that writing the history of women is 'part of an ongoing recasting of historical 'knowledge'; who and what gets into the record of the past are contentious political matters and women's history, like labour history or black history, has contributed to the argument.' Sheila Rowbotham, *A Century of Women: The History of Women in Britain and the United States,* London & New York: Viking, 1997, p. 3.
3. We use the word, 'post-colonial' to mean the period starting from 1947 when India became independent. We recognize that the independent state was not free from the colonial legacy, and indeed carried it on in multiple ways, as the essays in the volume will show.
4. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Trans. G.E.M. New York: Anscombe, 1953, para 67, cited in Veena Das, *Remaking a World: Violence, Social Sufferings and Recovery*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 3.
5. I have borrowed these words from Joan Wallach Scott, 'Gender: A useful Category of Historical Analysis', in Joan Wallach Scott (ed.), *Feminism and History*, Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1996 p. 153.
6. Bharati Ray, 'Intro' in Bharati Ray ed., *From the Seams of History: Essays on Indian Women'*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 2.
7. For instance, Hazel Carby in her book *Reconstructing Womanhood* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1989) contends that ideologies of white womanhood were 'sites of racial and class struggle which enabled white women to negotiate their subordinate role in relation to patriarchy and at the same time to ally their class interests with men and against establishing an alliance to black women.' Cited in Suzie Tharu and K. Lalitha, *Women Writing in India: 600 B.C. to the Present*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993, vol. 2, footnote 32, p. 17.
8. Joan Wallach Scott, *Feminism and History*, p. 154.

9. Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, 'Intro', in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, (eds.), *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1989, p. 3.
10. See K.M. Panikkar, 'The Intellectual History of Colonial India: some Historiographical and Conceptual Questions', in S. Bhattacharya and Romila Thapar (eds.) *Situating Indian History*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986; Uma Chakravarti, 'Whatever Happened to the Vedic Dasi? Orientalism, Nationalism, and a Script for the Past', in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (eds.) *Recasting Women*; Partha Chatterjee, The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question', in ibid., esp. pp. 237–38; Dipesh Chakravarty, 'The Difference-Deferral of a Colonial Modernity: Public Debates on Domesticity in British Bengal', in David Arnold and David Hardiman (eds.), *Subaltern Studies* VIII, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994; Himani Banerji, *Inventing Subjects: Studies in Hegemony, Patriarchy and Colonialism*, New Delhi: Tulika, 2001.
11. See Bharati Ray, 'The Freedom Movement and Feminist Consciousness', Bharati Ray (ed.), *From the Seams of History*, esp. pp. 201–18. Although as Tanika Sarkar has pointed out, women went back home when the freedom struggle was over, we must remember that organized hierarchical networks are inter-implicated with one another. The battle against political subjugation under an oppressive colonial rule must have generated awareness of the unequal gender hierarchy. Comprehension of the notions and practical implications of 'subjection', 'bondage', 'oppression', 'deliberate denial' etc., emerged among women in however limited a way. See also Tanika Sarkar, 'Politics and Women in Bengal–the Conditions and Meaning of Participation', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. 21, No.1, 1984. Suzie Tharu and K. Lalitha contend that the first phase of the women's movement started in the nineteenth century, the second phase with the nationalist movement and the third phase in the 1970s. Tharu and Lalitha, op. cit., note 8, p. 48.
12. For example, an insightful discussion on post-independence Hindu marriage and succession laws was made by Lotika Sarkar in my earlier work. See Lotika Sarkar, 'Reform of Hindu Marriage and Succession Laws: Still the Unequal Sex', in Bharati Ray & Aparna Basu (eds.), *From Independence towards Freedom: Indian Women Since 1947*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 100–19.
13. Zoya Hasan, 'Muslim Women and the Debate on Legal Reforms', in ibid., pp. 120–34.
14. For Hindu women the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955, and the Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act of 1956 and the Hindu Succession Act of 1956 were passed. For Christian women the Christian Divorce Act of 1869 was amended in 2001, in response of demand for reform that came from the Christian community itself. According to the1869 Act, Divorce and Matrimonial Laws enforceable in courts in England were applicable for Indian Christians, as if Indian Christians were British subjects. Moreover, while men could divorce on grounds of adultery, women needed to prove both adultery and cruelty or desertion. Again, on dissolution of marriage on the ground of adultery of the wife, her property could be settled for the benefit of the husband. But there was no corresponding provision for the benefit of the wife. These three glaring inequalities have been removed. However, not much attempt has been made to reform Muslim personal laws. Muslim women are governed by the Marriage Act

of 1939 and the Shariat Act of 1937. Unfortunately, the Muslim Women (Protection and Divorce) Act, the only post independence Act for Muslim women, was passed in 1986, and it made invalid a 1985 judgment, the Shah Bano judgment, that awarded to elderly Muslim women the right to maintenance following her divorce.

15. See Sherry Ortner, 'Is Woman to Man Like Nature is to Culture?' in Michelle Rosaldo & Louise Lamphere, *Women, Society, and Culture*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1981.
16. Interestingly, Swami Vivekananda, while noting the basic differences between women's role in India and that in the West, said that in India, she was the mother; in the West, her main function was as the wife. 'In India,' said he, 'the mother is the centre of the family and our highest ideal. She is to us the representative of God, as God is the mother of the Universe'. Swami Vivekananda, *Complete Works*, Calcutta: Mayavati Memorial Edition, vol. 2, pp. 506–7. For a recent feminist exposition, see Maithreyee Krishnaraj, 'Motherhood: Power and Powerlessness' in Jasodhara Bagchi, ed. *Indian Women: Myth and Realty*, Calcutta: Sangam, 1995, p. 34.
17. See Indira Chowdhury's interesting argument in *The Frail Hero and Virile History: Gender and Politics of Culture in Colonial Bengal*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998, that enlightened mothers were a requirement for rearing a special brand of men, brave, vigorous and patriotic.
18. Monica Das Gupta and Lincoln C. Chen, 'Intro', in Monica Das Gupta, Lincoln C. Chen and T. N. Krishnan, eds. *Health, Poverty and Development in India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 1–22; the quotes are from pp. 5 & 12. In the same volume, Amartya Sen in his article 'Objectivity, Health and Policy', argues that ' the absence of a perceived sense of gender inequality', even among poor rural women themselves, is 'central to the understanding' of the persistence of gender inequality and the 'objective picture of women's deprivation'.
19. Nandita Gandhi and Nandita Shah, *The issues at Stake: Theory and Practice in the Contemporary Women's Movement in India*, New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1991, p. 112. This book has a good chapter on women's right to health, especially on family planning programmes, see pp. 102–59, esp. pp. 113–44.
20. See *Report of the Department of Women and Child Development*, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, 2002.
21. Lyndal Roper has a good essay, 'Discipline and Respectability: Prostitution and the Reformation in Augsburg' in Joan Scott, *Feminism and History*, pp. 333–63. See also John Frederick & Thomas L. Kelly, *Fallen Angels: The Sex Workers of South Asia*, New Delhi: Lustre Press, 2000.
22. For recent feminist analysis, see Patricia Uberoi (ed.), *Social Reform, Sexuality and the State*. New Delhi: Sage, 1996 & Mary E. John & Janaki Nair (eds.), *A Question of Silence? The Sexual Economies of Modern India*, New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1998. John and Mary assert that their concern is 'with the materiality of the sites where discussions of 'sex' are laid out and contested rather than with abstract positions'.
23. In this context, it is relevant to look at Sonal Shukla, 'Family in Feminist Songs, A Continuity with Women's Folk Literature', paper presented at Bhubaneswar, September 2002. Shukla argues that there is an enormous literature created anonymously by

women in the form of folk songs, some of which mock the in laws and even their own natal families for choosing unsuitable marriages for them. Radical in content and quite subversive in spirit, these songs, Shukla contends, are a continuity with the protest tradition in women's anonymous written literature.

24. Within the historiography on Victorian life there was a growing body of opinion, reflected in the writing of people such as J.S. Mill or George Eliot, that love, or marriage, needed to be companionate. Equally, an emerging body of Indian history writing pertaining to the colonial period explores the idea of 'companionate marriage'. See Meredith Borthwick, *The Changing Role of Women in Bengal, 1849–1905*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984, pp. 26–108.
25. For a recent analysis, see Kalpana Kannabiran and Vasanth Kannabiran, *De-Eroticizing Assault: Essays on Modesty, Honour and Power*, Calcutta: Stree, 2002. Kannabirans argue that assault on women is not only to be seen as a sexual act, it needs to be gleaned through the prism of the particular social location of the victim.
26. For a telling story, see Bharati Ray, 'Women and Partition: Some Questions', in Bharati Ray and Aparna Basu (eds.), *From Independence Towards Freedom*, pp. 1–18.
27. Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*, New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1998.
28. Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition*, Delhi: Kali for Women, 1998.
29. Bharati Ray, 'Globalization, Quality of Life and Women in India', in Donald Lamberton ed., *Managing the Global: Globalization, Employment and Quality of life*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2002, pp. 145–16, gives a brief analysis.
30. See, for instance the National Crime Record Bureau Record, cited in, *Women in India: A Statistical Profile,* Government of India, 1997.
31. Ghulam Murshid, *Reluctant Debutante,* Rajshahi: *Sahitya Samsad,* 1983, p. 199.
32. See Partha Chatterjee, 'Nationalist Resolution', and Dipsh Chakrabarty, 'The Difference-Deferral of a Colonial Modernity'. For a more recent study, see Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion and Cultural Nationalism*, New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001.
33. Uma Chakravarti, 'Whatever Happened to the Vedic Dasi?' in *Recasting Women*. See also Sumanta Banerjee, *The Parlour and the Street: Elite and Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Bengal,* Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1989.
34. Mrinalini Sinha, 'Gender in the Critiques of Colonialism and Nationalism: Locating the Indian Woman', in Joan Scott (ed.), *Feminism and History*, p. 481.
35. Sonia Nishat Amin, 'The Early Muslim *Bhadramahila*: The growth of Learning and Creativity, 1876–1939, in Bharati Ray (ed.), *From the Seams*, p. 108.
36. Faisal F. Devji argues that the movement for women's reform in Muslim India during the period under discussion was an attempt initiated by the emerging new service gentry with a view to the Islamization of women. Cited in Sonia Nishat Amin 'The Orthodox Discourse and the Emergence of the Muslim *Bhadramahila* in Early Twentieth Century', in Rajat Kanta Ray, (ed.), *Mind, Body and Society: Life and Mentality in Colonial Bengal,* New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 394.

37. For details, see Gail Minault, *Secluded Scholars: Women's Education and Muslim Reform in Colonial India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998, esp. pp. 58–104.
38. The male-female literacy gap is 21.70% in 2001. See Kirit S. Parikh, 'Social Infrastructure as Important as Physical infrastructure', in Kirit S. Parikh and R. Radhakrishnan (eds.), *India Development Report 2002*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 104.
39. I owe this paragraph to Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha, *This Fissured Land: An Ecological History of India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, paperback edn. 1996, pp. 3–5. The quotes are from these pages. One has to mention that not only academics, women activists also did not show any awareness of women's role in the interaction with and preservation of nature. It was the Chipko movement which brought the issue to the forefront of the women's movement.
40. See Bina Agarwal's important work, *A Field of One's Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
41. In Bangladesh, Mohammad Yunis has initiated a project of 'Grameen Bank' for credit to poor rural women. It has become a model to be emulated by other third world countries.
42. See Indira Hirway, 'Economic Reforms and Gender Issues in India', *Indian Journal of Labour Economics*, vol. 39 no. 3, July/September, 1996, pp. 577–89; Nirmala Banerjee & S. Mitter, 'Women Making a Meaningful Choice: Technology and the New Economic Order', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 33, no. 52, 19 Dec. 1998. For a short summary, see Bharati Ray, 'Globalization, Quality of Life and Women in India', in Donald Lamberton (ed.), *Managing the Global'*, 145–161.
43. See Nata Duvaary, "Work Participation of Women in India: A Study with Special Reference to Female Agricultural Labourers, 1961 to 1981," in A.V. Jose (ed.), *Limited Options: Women Workers in Rural India*. New Delhi: ARTEP, 1989; Nirmala Banerjee, 'Trends in Women's Employment, 1971-1981: Some Macro Level Observations', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 25, 29 April, 1989; V. K. Ramachandran, *Wage Labour and Unfreedom in Agriculture: An Indian Case Study*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990.
44. Sudha Deshpande and Lalit Deshpande, 'Impact of Liberalisation on Labour Market in India: What do Facts from NSSO's 50th Round Show?', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 33, no. 22, 30 May, 1998, L31–L39.
45. Bahnisikha Ghosh, 'The Role of Women in Economic Activity: A Study of women in Rice Farming Systems in West Bengal' in Bharati Ray, (ed.), *From the Seams of History*; Bahnisikha Ggosh & Sudhin Mukhopadhyay, 'Displacement of the Female in the Indian Labour Force', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 24 Nov, 1984; Bahnisikha Ghosh, *The Indian Population Problem: A Household Economic Approach*, Delhi: Sage, 1990.
46. Indira Hirway, "Estimating Workforce Using Time Use Statistics in India and its Implications for Employment Policies," paper presented at the *International Seminar on Time Use Studies*, Ahmedabad, December 7–10, 1999. I am grateful to Indira Hirway for discussions on the subject.
47. A recent study of a water scarce village of Kanpar in Gujarat reveals the impact of water scarcity on women and how they struggle to cope with the drought and the power of the corporate sector, a major user of water. See Jaysree Soni, 'Promoting Democracy

Within the Family: A case of Water Collection and Gender Discrimination', Paper presented at the Xth National Conference of the Indian Association of Women's Studies, Bhubaneswar, 17–20 October, 2002.

48. For example, Jasbir Jain & Sudha Rai (eds.), *Films and Feminism: Essays in Indian Cinema*, New Delhi: Rawat Publications, 2002.
49. For example, Aparna Sen's 'Parama' (1984), 'Sati', (2000) and 'Paramitar Ekdin' (2002). The story, the script and the direction are all hers.
50. Denis Kandiyoti, 'Bargaining with Patriarchy', *Gender and Society*, 2:3, 1988, pp. 274–90.
51. Bharati Ray, 'Intro', in Bharati Ray (ed.), *Nari O Parivar: Bamabodhini Patrika*, 1863–1922 (Women and the Family: *Bamabodhini Patrika*, 1863-1922*)*, Kolkata: Ananda Publishers, 2002.
52. Malavika Karlekar, *Voices from Within: Early Personal Narratives of Bengali Women*, Delhi: Oxford University Press. 1991, p. 195.
53. Raka Ray, *Fields of Protest: Women's Movement in India*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999, p. 4.
54. See, for example, D. Jain and Pam Rajput (edn.), *Narratives from the women's Studies Family: Recreating Knowledge*, New Delhi: Sage, London: Thousand Oaks, 2003.

SECTION ONE

FAMILY/LAW

CHAPTER 1

Politicization of Personal Laws: A Study of Colonial India

Flavia Agnes

INTRODUCTION

The hundred years 1850–1950, which mark the nation's struggle for independence, are also the years in which the edifice of personal laws was erected. Hence the edifice is rife with the political undercurrents of the period. The struggle for women's rights within the realm of family laws is entrenched within these undercurrents, which have become an integral and inseparable component of them.

The process was initiated with the codification of laws after the administration of India was transferred from the Company to the British Crown. At this time a distinction was made between the laws of the 'personal' and 'public' spheres and the personal laws, to a large extent, were left uncodified to be governed by native jurisprudence. Despite this restraint, the legal structure of the personal laws, as we understand the term today, was shaped during this period, initially through a process of judicial pronouncements and later through statutory enactments. While women's welfare was the stated agenda, the political undercurrents played a crucial role in moulding this structure.

English legal principles were introduced within the Indian jurisprudence with the introduction of matrimonial statutes for Christians and Parsis, certain statutes of common application and through the channel of judicial pronouncements. These principles gradually influenced even the uncodified 'personal laws' of Hindus and Muslims and remoulded them along the lines of English statutes, to suit the requirements of an adversarial court system. The English principles of matrimonial jurisprudence could now be read into the *native* laws and customs. The anti-women bias and English norms of Victorian prudity could now be elevated into rigid legal principles of Indian family laws.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, women's rights became a highly contested issue within the discourse of national identity and the reformers met with a great deal of hostility from the conservatives. The growing antagonism between Hindu and Muslim communities within the nationalist movement also rendered the project of evolving uniform family laws an impossibility.

During the 1920s, in response to Gandhi's call, a large number of women entered the political arena. At their insistence, the question of women's rights was once again placed within the political sphere of the nationalist discourse. This resulted in the enactment of some statutes in the 1930s, which secured Hindu and Muslim women certain significant rights. In the years immediately preceding independence, during the debate in the Constitutional Assembly, the mandate on equality provided the necessary backdrop for formulating women's rights. But at this stage, the issue of women's rights was coloured by the political concerns of an emerging nation. While laying the foundation of a modern democracy the rights of citizens had to be defined. Here, the conflicting pulls between the rights of minorities to a cultural and religious identity and the concern for an integrated nation within clearly defined territorial boundaries became the context within which the issue of women's rights had to be renegotiated.

The process of evolving and moulding family laws of various communities during the politically significant period preceding independence is traced in this essay.

POWER FROM THE COMPANY TO THE CROWN

After the political upheaval of 1857, when the administration of India shifted from the Company to the British Crown, a reassurance of non-interference in religious beliefs and practices became imperative. In her historic proclamation, Queen Victoria promised equal protection of the law for all religions and restrained the administrators from interference in the realm of personal beliefs and practices of the natives by declaring: *We do strictly charge and enjoin all those who may be in authority under us that they abstain from all interference with the religious belief or worship of any subjects on pain of our highest displeasure.*[1] Since the British administrators had already concluded that practices governing family relationships are '*religious*' this proclamation could be construed to protect the family laws from any interference by the administrators.

The Government of India Act of 1858 transformed every aspect of the Indian administration. As part of this process, the legal structure also went through a major change. The Supreme Courts in the Presidency towns of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras which were set up in the preceding century during the Company rule and which operated with relative autonomy were replaced by an integrated system of High Courts with Privy Council as the final Court of Appeal. The Presidencies lost their autonomy and were joined into a unified imperial rule. The features of the administration as developed in Bengal were made the basis for new forms of unified administration for all the three Presidencies. The Bombay Presidency's treatment of self-governing groups and its acceptance of customary law gave way to the Bengal practice of viewing all groups as possessing of a unified Hindu and Muslim legal entity.[2]

While the realm of the *personal* was largely left untouched as per the proclamation, the new legal structure based on the model of the English courts necessitated the enactment of statutes to regulate the *public domain.* The extent of codification can be gauged by the fact that under Henry Maine, member of Governor General's Legislative Council, from 1861 to 1869, 211 enactments were formulated, out of which 30 were major.[3]

The cornerstones of this new legal edifice were the Indian Penal Code and the Indian Contract Act which facilitated smooth administration by laying down uniform laws regulating crime and punishment and commercial transactions. These two statutes formed the core of the criminal (penal) and civil (economic) legal principles in India. The Indian Penal Code of (1860) (along with the Indian Evidence Act of 1872 and the Criminal Procedure Act of 1898) replaced the Islamic criminal system. The Indian Contract Act of 1860 (along with the Specific Relief Act of 1877, the Negotiable Instruments Act of 1881 and the Transfer of Property Act of 1882) laid down uniform laws to facilitate smooth economic transaction for the capitalist economy of the corporate world.[4]

The Hindu notion of *dharma* differed a great deal from the British notion of law and justice. The term *dharma* was broad and inclusive and could be applied to all aspects of life. Manu's categorization of 18 heads of law included both civil and criminal issues. The Islamic law also dealt with civil and criminal aspects. But the process of legislation adopted by the British was selective and affected only some aspects of civil and criminal law while a large area which was termed as *religious* was left out of its purview, to be regulated by the *natives* as per their religious doctrines. But the categorization of matters to be dealt with under personal laws was fluid and was determined by the needs of the rising colonial empire. For instance, the initial charters had listed *contract* as an issue left for application of customary law. But since contract was essential to the foundation of a capitalist economy, it was taken out of the realm of 'religious' personal laws and was legislated upon. By treating only some aspects of these laws as religious, the British jurists were applying to them the Roman categorization of ecclesiastical and temporal (Canon and Civil) laws. Further all issues concerning personal matters were deemed religious rather than customary. Over a period, the terms religious laws and personal laws were used as synonymous and interchangeable.[5] The First Law Commission's recommendation to codify personal laws was rejected on the ground that these laws are religious and since British legislature cannot regulate Mohammedan or Hindu religion, it also cannot (or shall not) legislate for Mohammedans or Hindus.

But ironically, the new judicial system also provided an insidious backdoor entry for tinkering with and shaping every aspect of the so-called religious personal laws under the imperial rule. Under the new system of adjudication, case law or judicial interpretation of legal principles became an important new source of law entrusted with greater validity and binding force than the scriptures themselves. Through this source, inroads were made into the realm of personal laws. The Indian Law Reports Act of 1875 strengthened the already established practice of relying upon the rulings of other collateral or superior courts. By the end of the nineteenth century, the realm of uncodified 'personal law' was reduced primarily to case law reported in law journals.[6] The extent to which women's rights were subverted through this process makes an interesting study.

SUBVERSION OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS

The establishment of courts based on the procedures of the English courts with English rules and procedures and a clear hierarchy of courts was meant to make the arbitration forum certain and definite, along the model of English courts. The English principles of justice. equity and good conscience were used as direct channels for introducing English laws and customs into areas reserved as personal laws.[7] These notions which crept into the Hindu and Muslim laws transformed the local traditions and usages in unforeseen directions.

Despite the initial policy of non-interference in personal matters, as the British rule gained acceptance and stability, there was a gradual process of tampering with the established local customs through various means. The legal structure was seen by the administrators as an important forte of its civilizing mission.

At this stage, the process of evolving laws at the local level through commentaries, which incorporated within them the local customs, was arrested. The British interpretations of the ancient texts became binding and made the law certain, rigid and uniform. This clear marker of modernity was welcomed by the newly evolving English-educated middle class of Bengal and provided the British a moral justification for ruling India, as harbingers of enlightenment. Through their interventions the Hindu society could rid itself of its 'barbarism' and enter an era of 'civilization'. An image of the cruel and superstitious natives who needed Christian salvation, was deliberately constructed by the Evangelists.

The much-acclaimed Sati Regulation Act of 1829 was followed by other legislations such as the Widow Remarriage Act 1856, the Age of Consent Act of 1860 and the Prohibition of Female Infanticide Act of 1872. These legislations, focusing on the 'barbaric' customs of the natives, convey an impression that the exception to the rule of non-interference in the realm of personal laws was for the benefit of women. There is a presumption that by incorporating the concepts of modernity into the native jurisprudence, the status of women in India was elevated. But recent scholarship has questioned this premise.[8]

The British intervention did not stop at the level of welfare legislation for women but extended into two other spheres which have not received due attention. One set of legislations carved the space for men's individual property rights into a system based on joint family property and rigid caste affiliations and laid the ground for the introduction of the capital mode of production in an urban setting.[9] But what is even more disturbing for our purpose here is that simultaneously, through a series of judicial decisions, the scope of women's rights was constrained beyond all recognition. For example, the Mitakshara had expanded the scope of *stridhana to* include property acquired by woman through every source, including inheritance and partition. But the judicial decisions changed this concept and laid down that inherited property is not *stridhana*. A new legal principle was gradually introduced through court decisions: that whether the property is inherited by a woman through her male relatives (father, son, husband) or through her female relatives (mother, mother's mother, daughter), it is not her *stridhana* and that it would devolve on the heirs of her husband or father. The women lost the right to will or gift away their *stridhana* and it acquired the character of a limited estate. Any transaction by a widow in respect of the property inherited by her, had to be justified on two grounds, legal necessity or religious or charitable purpose. Upon the widow's death, the property reverted back to the husband's male relatives. The introduction of this concept of 'reversioners', which is basically a legal principle under the English law, bestowed upon the male relatives the right to challenge all property dealings by Hindu widows.

To provide concrete examples of this trend, some decisions of the newly evolving legal machinery of British India are discussed below. These judgements have several commonalities. The litigations against the widows were initiated by the husband's heirs. In a significant number of cases, following local customs, the lower courts upheld the women's rights. The lower court decisions were reversed by the higher judiciary which then became binding principles of law. Significantly, in all the cases discussed below, the decisions were from property disputes within the Bengal Presidency, but under the consolidated scheme of hierarchy of courts, they became the binding principles of law for other presidencies.

In 1868 in *Srinath Gangopadhya v Sarbamangala Debi*[10] the Calcutta High Court held that as per the Benares school, once a *stridhana* property devolves upon an heir, it loses its character as *stridhana* and devolves as per ordinary rules of Hindu law. In another landmark case around this time, the Privy Council held that the property inherited by the widow from her husband was not her *stridhana*. The Privy Council reversed the judgement of the lower court and proclaimed: Under the law of the Benares School, notwithstanding the ambiguous passage in the Mitakshara, no part of her husband's estate whether movable or immovable to which a Hindu woman succeeds by inheritance, forms part of her *stridhana*.[11] This legal precedent set by the Privy Council became binding rule of law and dealt a lethal blow to the property rights of Hindu widows as the decisions of the various High Courts in the subsequent decade reveal. This principle was followed by the Calcutta High Court in 1874 in *Gonda Kooer v Kooer Gody Singh*.[12] The widow had purchased property out of the accumulated income from her *stridhana* and pleaded that it should be considered as her *stridhana*. But following the rule laid down by the Privy Council, the Calcutta High Court held that the property was not *stridhana* and hence she did not have the right to dispose it off by will and upon her death it would devolve on her husband's heirs. The court also ruled that the property inherited by a daughter from her father is not *stridhana*.[13] This principle was then extended to the property inherited by an unmarried daughter from her mother[14] and later stretched to include the property inherited from all female relatives, thus sealing all avenues for the continuation of property devolution in the female line.

The substantial case law on this issue made it impossible to retreat from this position. In 1879 while holding that the property inherited from the father is not *stridhana*, the Privy Council expressly stated that since this rule has been established by a series of decisions in Bengal, a different interpretation of the *old and obscure* texts cannot be followed. The Privy Council further stated that the courts ought not unsettle a rule of inheritance affirmed by a long course of decision unless it is manifestly opposed to law and reason. The Privy Council explained that the rule has been laid down by Sir William Macnaghten in his Treatise on Hindu Law as follows: "Under no circumstances can a daughter's son, daughter, husband or other descendants inherit the property which devolved on her at her father's death. Such property is not *stridhana* and will devolve on her father's heirs". The court further held that this rule is not opposed to the spirit and principles of Mitakshara.[15] It is interesting to note that during the early years of administration, contemporary practices were discarded in favour of ancient and 'obscure texts', during the later period, after the establishment of Anglicized courts, the court decisions and translated texts were granted greater validity than the written texts which now came to be discarded as 'old and obscure'.

The facts of two more cases on the issue of women's property are set out in detail. In the first case, *Mussammat Thakoor Deyhee v Rai Baluk Ram*,[16] a childless widow Choteh Babee, gifted the property she inherited from her husband to her niece. It is reported in the judgement that Choteh Babee, despite being a *purdah nishin*, was an excellent businesswoman who managed her property well. The husband's heirs challenged the deed, inter alia, on the ground that it was fraudulent and that she had no power of alienation over immovable property inherited from her husband. Sudder Ameen of Benares held that the widow was competent to gift the property. Sudder Dewaney Adawlut of Agra reversed the decision on the ground that the deed of gift was a forged document. At this point the right of the widow to gift her property was not a disputed issue before the court. The court only examined whether the gift deed was an authentic or a forged document. In appeal the Privy Council ruled: The widow has no power to dispose of immovable property inherited from her husband, whether ancestral or acquired.

The second case decided by the Privy Council in 1903, *Sheo Shankar v Debi Sahai,*[17] provides yet another illustration of the judicial trend. The woman had inherited the property from her mother. After her death, her sons claimed the property as heirs of the mother and grandmother and deprived their sister. The subordinate judge of Gorakhpur, on 7th December, 1897 held that the property inherited through the female line was the woman's *stridhana* and hence her sons had no right over it. On appeal, the Allahabad High Court reversed the decision. This resulted in an appeal to the Privy Council. In February, 1903 the Privy Council upheld the decision of the High Court and laid down that the property inherited by a woman from her mother is not her *stridhana* and hence it will not devolve on her daughter who is her *stridhana* heir, but upon her son.

Ironically, while Hindu women were better protected by invoking the local customs in the Bombay region, the Muslim women's textual right to inherit property was defeated by upholding Hindu customs and usages. The Muslim trading communities of Gujarat, the Khojas and Cutchi Memons, followed the local custom of coparcenary or joint family property.[18] The male-headed coparcenaries denied women their right to a stipulated share in the property as per the Shariat. Under the rules of Shariat, coparcenary is not recognized, hence this custom was challenged in the Bombay High Court.

By a common judgement, Justice Erskine Perry decided three cases filed by women claiming inheritance right to parental property.[19] In the first case, two daughters of a rich merchant Mir Ali, who did not leave behind a male heir, filed a suit to claim their father's property worth three lakhs. On their behalf it was argued that the Hindu custom of disinheriting daughters, which has been adopted by Mohammedans, is most unreasonable. Hence public policy would dictate the adoption of the wiser rule laid down by the Koran by which daughters are awarded a fixed share. A contrast was drawn between the relative positions held by females in Hindu and Muslim systems. On behalf of the women it was further argued that since the Muslim system was more beneficial to women, in the larger interest of women's welfare, it was the duty of the court to give it effect when the two diverse practices are examined.

The comments of Lord Erskine Perry while disallowing the woman's claim make interesting reading: A custom for females to take no share in the inheritance is not unreasonable in the eyes of the English law, for it accords in great part with the universal custom as to real estates where there are any male issues and with some local customs mentioned by Blackstone through which in certain manors females are excluded in all cases.[20] The judge commented further that since the attempt of the young women to disturb the course of succession, which had prevailed among their ancestors for many hundreds of years, has failed, they must now pay the price of this unsuccessful experiment by paying the cost to the defendants.[21]

While at one level the *smriti* law was distorted, at the other, this distorted law was applied to a wide range of communities following diverse customs. As the above case reveals, an interesting phenomenon during litigation seems to be for women to plead a non-Hindu status in order to protect their rights and for the men within the family to implore the protection of the distorted *smriti* law. If the courts could be convinced that the community was ruled by either the Muslim law, the Indian Succession Act or the customary law (by claiming a *sudra* status) the rights of women could be saved. If the courts bestowed a Hindu status upon the communities (or validated the application of the Hindu law as in the above case), women's right would be curtailed. Most of these were borderline cases where the pendulum would swing from one end to the other. But when the issue was finally decided by the Privy Council or the respective High Court as the case may be, the religious status of the community (and thereby the fate of its women and illegitimate children) would be sealed for all future litigations.

In several litigations the widows from various Jain sects pleaded their right to adopt a son to their deceased husband under a separate law or a local custom. But the custom could not be proved to the level of legal validity and women lost their right of adoption as *smriti* law was applied to them. It is through these disputes that Jains became categorized as a Hindu sect. Another illustration is the *Asura* (or an unapproved) form of marriage. If a custom to this effect could be proved, the property could be saved from the reversioners. Yet another example is the dispute between a widow and illegitimate sons within the Lingayat community. Since a custom could be proved of remarriages of divorcees and widows, the community was categorized as *sudra* and hence the illegitimate sons were declared as heirs to the father's property. The dispute could be confined between widows and illegitimate sons rather than its extension to reversioners.[22]

The period between 1850 and 1930 witnessed the elimination of a wide range of customs which diverged from the Anglo-Hindu tradition, as the standard of proof required was very high. Unless it could be proved that the custom was ancient, certain, obligatory, reasonable and not against public policy, it had a very slim chance of survival. Derrett comments that in this manner, the Anglo-Hindu law with its Dharmashastra background was spread more widely than it had ever been before. The only customs which were saved from the crushing effects of the British courts were the customs of the agricultural classes in the Punjab and matrilineal practices of the Malabar region.[23] The tendency of both the British courts and of the urban Hindu middle class was to ignore the diversities and to impose a legal Hinduism upon these communities. Contrary to popular belief, many of the customs which were crushed were those in favour of women.

STATE-ENACTED *RELIGIOUS* LAWS OF CHRISTIANS AND PARSIS

Since the Queen's Proclamation had placed a restraint upon legislation for Hindus and Muslims, the seeds of codification of family laws lie elsewhere, namely, in the legal history of two marginalized minority communities – the Christians and the Parsis. Although the statutes governing these communities were state enactments, since they governed family relationships, even these came to be viewed as religious *personal* laws.

Christianity entered India in three distinct phases. It is believed that Christianity was first brought into India by a disciple of Jesus Christ, Saint Thomas, soon after the crucifixion in the first century. As per the oral history, Saint Thomas landed on the Malabar coast. A church in Quilon is believed to have been built by the Saint.[24] The Christianity of this period was affiliated to the orthodox traditions of West Asia, i.e. Syria, Armenia and Antiochia. The second phase was during the sixteenth century after the Portuguese established the trade routes and conquered a few Indian territories. They were concentrated in the Western Coast of Goa, Vasai and Konkan and belonged to the Roman Catholic faith. The third phase is the Protestantism and the theology of enlightenment brought in by the missionaries of various British and European churches during the later period colonialism. But until the nineteenth century, the converted Christians followed the local customary practices of pre-conversion traditions in respect of property inheritance and marriage rituals. The concept of a distinct Christian personal law evolved much later, i.e. only during the later half of the nineteenth century.

The two initial statutes enacted by the British were meant only to aid the process of proselytization. The Caste Disabilities Removal Act (or the Freedom of Religion Act) of 1850 was aimed at protecting the Christian converts from disinheritance from their respective families.[25] The Native Converts' Marriage Dissolution Act of 1866 provided for the dissolution of the converts' marriages contracted prior to conversion. Later two more statutes were enacted to regulate Christian marriages, the Indian Divorce Act (IDA) of 1869, which provided for divorce and the Indian Christian Marriage Act (ICMA) of 1872, which provided for the solemnization and regulation of Christian marriages. The primary aim was to extend to the British and other Europeans the beneficial provisions of the English statute. The inclusions of indigenous Christians were only incidental.[26]

The Indian Divorce Act of 1869, which was modelled on the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 of England, is significant for our discussion. This statute was a milestone in the history of English matrimonial law as it transferred matrimonial jurisdiction from ecclesiastical courts to the civil courts in England and provided for dissolution of Christian marriages. The statute provided for adultery as the sole matrimonial offence (which, as far as the wife was concerned, had to be coupled with cruelty, desertion, incest or bestiality). Even prior to the enactment of the Indian Divorce Act in 1869, the British legal principles of morality, equity and good conscience could be effectively used as channels for incorporating the Anglo Saxon jurisprudence into the Indian legal system and more particularly the family laws. But in 1869, through a statutory process the principles of English matrimonial law were firmly established within the Indian jurisprudence.

While some matrimonial remedies had already entered India through English lawyers practising in the Indian courts and by the application of the Civil Procedure Code,[27] the Indian Divorce Act gave a statutory recognition to matrimonial reliefs like restitution of conjugal rights, judicial separation and annulment, which did not have any scriptural or customary basis in the Indian setting. It is significant to note that at this historical juncture, the laws and customs regulating most lower caste Hindus and Muslim communities provided for the dissolution of marriages. These dissolutions could be effected through community-based arbitration forum by fulfilling certain minimum conditions and without engaging in lengthy adversarial battles or incurring phenomenal costs. The relevant point to note is that these dissolutions were not effected through adversarial processes but through local and community-based arbitrations and with the consent of the parties or their families after returning the gifts received from the other spouse. In most cases, the party seeking dissolution had to pay back the marriage expenses and at times was called upon to pay compensation to the other spouse. In communities practising the custom of bride price, if the wife was seeking dissolution she herself, or on her behalf, her father or her future husband, would have to return the bride price. Among Muslim communities if the wife was seeking dissolution, she would have to forego the *mehr* amount which was stipulated at the time of marriage.

But the Christian tenet of marriage, moulded by the Roman Papal doctrine of medieval Europe, was diagonally opposed to this. Here, marriage was deemed an eternal and indissoluble sacrament. Marriages in England could be dissolved only through an Act of Parliament, a process beyond the reach of commoners. The Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 made some dent into the concept of indissoluble marital bondage by providing for the dissolution of marriage under certain stringent grounds. But divorce was a *relief* available only to an innocent spouse, if a matrimonial fault could be proved against the guilty partner. The spouse could also obtain a lesser relief of judicial separation and keep intact the matrimonial tie and thus deny the guilty spouse the option of remarriage. The parties could also enforce conjugality through judicial proceedings and compel a deserted spouse to return to the matrimonial dwelling under threat of imprisonment or confiscation of her property, a concept unheard of in the Indian setting. Overall, the Christian concept treated matrimony as a state of eternal bondage and the 1857 Act was meant to provide marginal respite from these archaic and anti-women notions. The aim of the Indian Divorce Act of 1869 was to extend the progressive provisions for European Christians and British subjects residing in India. But gradually, these English notions of marriage and matrimonial *relief* (e.g. restitution of conjugal rights, judicial separation and annulment of marriage) were incorporated into the personal laws of other communities either through judicial precedents or legislative enactments.

The subsequent British enactments liberalized divorce and by 1937 adultery, cruelty, desertion and insanity were made into independent grounds of divorce in England. Attempts were made to incorporate these liberal grounds into the laws governing Parsis, Muslims and Hindus in subsequent years through the enactment of the Parsi Marriage and Divorce Acts of 1936, the Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act of 1939 and the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955. Ironically, during the period 1935–1955 when the three religious communities went through a process of remoulding their laws along the Anglo Saxon matrimonial principles, there were no attempts to modernize the Christian family laws.

Two factors, one political and the other legal, could have led to this stalemate. On the political plane, perhaps the nationalist leaders viewed Christian religion (and laws) as the religion of the colonial masters, which would not warrant any reform through nationalist interventions. Absence of an Indian Christian political leader of repute within the nationalist movement perhaps resulted in the invisibility of issues concerning indigenous Christians. Seen from the legal point, the Indian Divorce Act of 1869 (modelled on the English statute of 1857) was so structured as to automatically incorporate the developments in the English matrimonial statutes within its scheme.[28] The comments of the Full Bench ruling of the

Madras High Court in 1936 are revealing. While interpreting S.7 of IDA the court held: The Indian courts have to keep pace with the practices in England and note changes that are made from time to time in the principles and rules of the English divorce law, since the English statute is the parent law.[29]

After independence, the changes in the political structure brought about a new status for indigenous Christians who were now reduced to the status of a politically insignificant minority. But the community continued to be governed by archaic and unreformed British statutes of the Victorian era. Ironically the demand for change by women's groups was throttled on the absurd premise that the Christian religion does not recognize divorce. Finally, after a sustained struggle, the archaic law of 1869 was changed in 2001, after nearly a century and half.

DEVELOPMENT OF PARSI LAWS OF MARRIAGE AND SUCCESSION

The development of the Parsi legal system usually tends to get marginalized in the discourse on family laws of India and hence it has been dealt with in detail here. Rather curiously, the demand for a separate law evolved very clearly and distinctly to save the community from the anti-women practices of the then prevailing English laws of the early nineteenth century. But when the English law itself began to change and get modernized, the Parsis were among the first to take advantage of this development and model their personal laws upon these principles.

The Parsis are a small, well-knit community, who sailed from Iran (Persia) in the seventh century and settled in Surat and Navsari on the Western Coast of India. They adopted the local language and customs while maintaining a distinct and separate identity. The adaptation of the institution of local *panchayats* for administration of their affairs is an important indicator of this adaptation. The community was transformed during colonial rule. Within the Bombay Presidency, they were the first to adapt to English education, new trading patterns and later to commerce and industry. They fitted in well with the new colonial administrative structure. The contribution of the Parsi community to building the city of Bombay, after the English take-over, is particularly significant. It is through their close interaction with the British, that the community evolved as an important economic and political force during the colonial regime and was able to negotiate for themselves a separate set of personal laws.

During the initial phase of the Company rule, the various British Charters explicitly saved the customs and usages of Hindus and Muslims in civil matters as they were deemed religious. But no such provision was granted to other communities like Parsis, Christians, Jews, Portuguese, Armenians and Europeans. The Presidency towns applied English law and in the Provinces, the law and custom of the parties (or the law of the defendant) was applied. In exercise of the discretion granted to the judges, English principles of justice, equity and good conscience were also applied as a residuary rule of law.[30] Under this legal scheme, English laws were applied to Parsis in all civil matters except marriage and bigamy.[31]

In 1835 a suit was filed by a son to appropriate the whole of the father's property through the application of the English principle of primogeniture (through which the eldest son inherits the whole property). Since this was not the custom followed by Parsis, the community was alarmed and pressed for a separate legislation. In their submission to the government, they pleaded that they were subjected to serious disadvantages in the absence of a fixed written code. In response to this appeal, an Act was passed in June 1837[32] which relieved the Parsis of Bombay from the operation of the English law of primogeniture. Through this statute, widows were granted a share in the property and the residue was divided equally amongst the children and their descendants. But English principles continued to be applied to them in all other respects, which, over the years turned out to be a contentious issue.

The Parsis wanted to be protected from two primary principles of English law: (i) the English Statute of Distribution in the case of intestacy and (ii) the English common law relating to husband and wife which denied married women independent control over their property during coverture.[33] But there was no further development on this issue. In a subsequent litigation, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Bombay held that the ecclesiastical relief of restitution of conjugal rights applies to Parsi marriages.[34] At this juncture, the community renewed the demand for separate legislations to govern Parsi Marriage, Divorce and Succession. But the third Law Commission rejected this demand as it felt that the demand was not substantiated. This left the community highly dissatisfied. On 20th August, 1855 a meeting of the Parsis of Bombay was convened in the central hall of the main fire temple to campaign for a separate law. The meeting was attended by 3,000 Parsis. A committee was appointed to prepare a draft Code of Laws adapted to the Parsi community and to petition the Legislative Council of India for the enactment thereof.

In 1859 the Managing Committee of the Parsee Law Association adopted a body of rules titled a Draft Code of Inheritance, Succession and other matter. The following year, this Draft Code was presented to the Legislative Council and was referred to a Select Committee. In 1861 the Select Committee of the Legislative Council recommended that the Government of Bombay appoint a Commission to make preliminary inquiry into the usages recognized as laws by the Parsi community of India. A commission appointed for this purpose recorded the evidence of the community representatives. As regards inheritance, succession and property between husband and wife, the *mofussil* Parsis objected to the rights of females to inherit the family property upon the death of a male Parsi and to the right of married women during coverture to hold or dispose of their separate property. The *mofussil* Parsis, however, agreed with the Bombay Parsis that the English Law of Inheritance and Succession was unsuited to the requirement of the Parsi community. The commission submitted its report in 1862 and rejected the demand for two separate Inheritance Laws, one for the Parsis of Bombay and another for the Parsis of the *mofussil* towns. As a next step, in 1864, the Parsi Law Commission was appointed and based on its report, in 1865, two statutes were enacted, i.e. The Parsi Intestate Succession Act, 1865 and The Parsi Marriage and Divorce Act of 1865. Thus finally, the Parsis succeeded in securing a separate law for themselves and this law became the first codified matrimonial law of the country.

The Parsi Marriage and Divorce Law incorporated the provisions of the English matrimonial statute,[35] which transformed the Christian marriage to a dissoluble contract. Following the Christian model, Parsi marriages were made monogamous and adultery was made into a ground of divorce.[36] Through these statutes, the Parsis also secured legal recognition for their customary arbitration forum of *panchayat*. Under the Act, a jury system consisting of seven representatives of the community was introduced. Through this process, the community obtained a hold over matters of marriage and divorce within the Anglo-Saxon court structure. Like other communities the characteristics of the Parsi community also were 'fixed' in the process of litigation over property disputes. In an important case decided in 1908 the courts ruled that there is no conversion among the Parsis. The issue arose due to a dispute between the head of the Parsi Anjuman of Bombay Sir Dinshaw Petit and Sir Jamsetji Jeejeebhoy, the industrialist around 1908. The contentious issue before the court was the creation of private trusts and the relegation of huge properties to it by the industrialist. The Parsi Anjuman objected to the creation of such private trusts. But the issue which was foregrounded during litigation was that of conversion. The Parsi Anjuman pleaded that Juddins (converts) who undergo the Navjot (initiation ceremony) and are given the sudra and kusti become Parsis. In a lengthy judgement of around 100 pages, a two-member bench consisting of one Parsi (Justice Davar) and one English judge ruled in favour of Jamsetji and validated the creation of private trusts. In the process they also invalidated conversions among Parsis. Adopting a rather curious logic, the court explained that while Zoroastrianism was a religion, Parsis were a race and there could not be conversion to a race. Just as a person could not convert and 'become' an Englishman or a Frenchman, similarly, no one could convert and 'become' a Parsi, the court explained.[37]

In order to prevent the Parsi trust property and fire temples from disappearing, in another decision it was ruled that converts to Zoroastrianism and children born to a Parsi woman who is married to a non-Parsi are not Parsis.[38] The children of a Parsi father and a non-Parsi mother are deemed Parsis. Interestingly, the issue before the court did not concern the rights of children born to a Parsi woman through her non-Parsi husband. The case concerned a Goan Christian girl Bella who was adopted and raised as a Parsi by a Parsi benefactor settled in Rangoon. Attracted to Zoroastrianism, she expressed a desire to convert and was initiated into the faith through a ceremony of initiation by a Parsi priest. But when she started attending worship at the fire temple the community elders raised an objection and filed a suit for injunction, restraining her entry into the fire temple. They pleaded that her presence in the fire temple caused distraction and prevented the Parsis from offering worship. Ironically the land upon which the fire temple was built was a state endowment for religious worship to the Parsis. The two lower courts held that since Bella had converted to Zoroastrianism her entry could not be prevented and she was entitled to worship in the fire temple. But the Privy Council, relying upon the Bombay High Court decision in *Dinsha Petit v Jamsetji Jeejeebhoy* held that the double requirements of religion and race are essential to worship in the fire temple despite the fact that the legal deeds were drawn specifically in the context of religion. Through these two significant decisions the avenues for conversion and adoption among the Parsis were sealed.

In 1925 when the Indian Succession Act was enacted (which governs mainly Christian succession), the Parsi Intestate Succession Act was verbatim incorporated in Chapter III of this Act. Interestingly, during the years 1870 to 1925 considerable progress was made in the realm of married women's property rights under the English statutes and the concept of equality between men and women regarding inheritance was widely accepted. Based on these developments, the Indian Succession Act did not discriminate between male and female heirs.

But the Parsi inheritance laws continued to maintain the discrimination and females continued to inherit half the share of their male counterparts.[39] This is a rather surprising development, given that the demand for a separate law for the Parsis originated with their resentment against the anti-women provisions of the English statutes being inadvertently applied to them. Again during the thirties, the community introduced further reforms in their personal laws. In 1933 the Council of the Parsi Central Association submitted a Draft Bill for the opinion of the Parsi public to amend the Parsi law of succession. The main objective was to improve the position of the widow and daughter under the statute, and the allotment of a share to parents. The changes were incorporated into the Indian Succession Act in 1939.[40]

During the period 1865 to 1930 the status of women in England was radically transformed through various statutes, and great strides were made in the English family laws. Against this backdrop, the Parsi Marriage and Divorce Act of 1865 had become outdated. So the community started yet another process of reform. A conference was arranged under the auspices of the Parsi *panchayat*. Twenty-five Parsi associations participated in this process and twenty-one associations approved the modifications.[41] Based on the various views expressed, a draft of the proposed Act was prepared and circulated which had the approval of leading members of the Parsi community including Sir Dinshaw E. Wacha and Right Hon'ble Dinshaw F. Mulla. A bill was introduced into the Council of State in 1935 by Sir Pheroze Sethna. The Federal Assembly considered the bill in April 1936. Sir Cowasji Jehangir, who moved the bill, explained that an overwhelming majority of the Parsi community held progressive views and were anxious to modify the provisions of their archaic laws to suit the modern conditions.[42] The reforms expanded the scope of dissolving the marriage by introducing several new grounds – non-consummation of marriage, insanity, pre-marriage pregnancy, grievous hurt and desertion. Through the active and alert participation of several legal luminaries of the community the Parsi law of marriage and divorce became the most progressive statute at the time of India's independence.

REMOULDING OF HINDU AND MUSLIM FAMILY LAWS WITHIN A WESTERN MODEL

Family disputes of Hindus and Muslims also had to be contested within the new legal structure founded on adversarial principles of English civil law. Matrimonial rights and obligations were reinterpreted within the paradigm of the matrimonial remedies of English courts. With their bulk, alien appearance, exotic trappings and Westminster's logomacy, the law of the country became alienated from the people.[43]

It is not the intention to negate the fact that customary practices as well as the doctrinal precepts of the pre-colonial Indian society contained several anti-women stipulations. But the scriptures were not statutes and contained scopes for debates among different authorities within a region. The language and the context of these texts were open to several interpretations leading to diverse customs within a pluralistic society. It would be logical to infer that the customs and their interpretations were not uniformly anti-women and that there were spaces for negotiating women's rights.

The English translations of the original texts had already subverted the context and meaning of these precepts. The anti-women biases and the Orientalist approaches of the translators also coloured the translations. Within the new litigation fora, the opinions expressed in these translated texts became definite legal principles of universal application. Published in law journals and relied upon in subsequent litigations, the most negative aspects of Hindu and Muslim laws were highlighted and over a period, became settled as infallible principles of Hindu and Muslim family law. The ancient texts were often used mainly to co-opt the anti-women provisions of English matrimonial statutes. The application of the medieval European (Christian) remedy of restitution of conjugal rights (incorporated in the English matrimonial statutes in 1857), to both Muslims and Hindus in India by re-interpreting their ancient legal texts is one concrete example of this new trend. Two landmark decisions of the Privy Council in *Gatha Ram Mistree v Moohito Kochin Domoonee* (1875) 14 BLR 298 and *Moonshee Buzloor Ruheem v Shumsoonissa Begum* (1867) 2 MIA 551 through which the remedy of restitution of conjugal rights was applied to Hindu and Muslim communities are particularly significant here. Subversion of women's economic rights upon marriage, i.e. the Hindu woman's right to *stridhana* and the Muslim woman's right to *mehr* (both of which could include immovable properties) to the English concept of maintenance provides another example. The introduction of the English principle of widow's limited estate and the concept of *reversioner* (to whom the property would revert back upon the death of the widow) is a third example of this trend.

Ironically, while the British used the status of women to rationalize the political subjugation of India as a civilizing project, the Hindu revivalists tried to re-locate these principles in their ancient texts, armed by the Orientalists' approach of a shared distant Aryan past. The concern of reformers for changing the status of women became trapped within the binaries of a superior Hindu culture projected by the revivalists and the civilizing project of the British administrators. But the rigid Victorian morality was the parameter set by all for determining the status of women.[44]

During the last phase of the nineteenth century, Hindu conjugality became the main battleground for the revivalist struggle for national identity, and any reform within personal laws came to be viewed by this faction with extreme hostility. The issue was foregrounded in the controversy regarding the Age of Consent both in Bombay and Bengal.[45] The controversy was galvanized by the decision of the Bombay High Court in the case of Rukmabai who was married in childhood and whose marriage had not been consummated.[46] The court had declined to pass a decree of restitution of conjugal rights in favour of her husband. The revivalists interpreted this judgement as interference in the sacrosanct arena of Hindu conjugality by the British courts (and a breach of the assurance on non-interference). For the reformers the intervention of the English courts was an armour in their campaign against the upper caste Hindu custom of child marriage. It is necessary to stress the caste factor because it is crucial to the debate. Among most of the lower castes child marriage was not a custom and among those lower castes which practised the custom, the right of conjugality would commence not from the date of marriage but only on the performance of a second ceremony after attaining puberty. As already stated, within the customary law, the relief of restoring conjugality was non-existent and the husband could not obtain any relief in this sphere. Conjugality has not been instituted and hence the question of 'restoring conjugality'– a European Christian remedy – did not apply to this case. Justice Pinhey who presided over the matter, had declined the relief on the ground that it was an outdated medieval Christian remedy under the English law and further that the Hindu law did not recognize such a barbaric custom.[47] But in the highly politicized climate these subtle legal points were lost. The debates raged round the audacity of an English judge to intervene in the realm of Hindu conjugality.

OPTION OF SECULAR AND CIVIL STATUTES

During this period, certain uniform and secular statutes governing family relationships were enacted, such as the Indian Succession Act of 1865 (re-enacted in 1925), the Special Marriage Act of 1872 (re-enacted in 1954) and the Guardians and Wards Act of 1890. Modelled on the principle of separation of the Canon and the Civil, which was gradually being accepted under the Anglo-Saxon law, these were purely civil enactments. There was no camouflage of religiosity here as in the enactments governing the Christian and Parsi communities.

The Special Marriage Act was a response to the demand raised by the Brahmos, as part of their campaign against Brahminical rituals within the Bengal Presidency, for a law enabling registration of simple, non-ritualistic civil marriages. The Act was passed despite opposition from orthodox sections and provided the opportunity for Indians to contract a marriage devoid of any religious trappings, in a civil registry. But it was mandatory for the parties contracting the marriage to declare that they had renounced religion. The stipulation of renouncing religion narrowed the scope of the Act. In 1912, a demand was raised for the deletion of this provision, and later, through an amendment in 1923, this clause was deleted. After marriage, for matters of property inheritance, the couple would now be governed by the provisions of the Indian Succession Act.

The Indian Succession Act contained separate sections for Parsis and non-Parsis. The provisions governing Parsis granted daughters a share in the family property but followed the Islamic principle of granting them half the share of their male counterparts. The general section was more egalitarian. Daughters were granted equal right of inheritance along with their brothers. But the statute also simultaneously validated the English notion of testamentary succession. The individual acquired an absolute right in the property and there were no restraints upon alienation either by transfer or bequest. This concentration of rights upon an individual was contrary to the prevailing norms governing both Hindu and Muslim property inheritance which prioritized the claim of family members over individual wishes. Although applicable primarily to Christians, this statute could be deemed a residuary law since it was also applicable to persons contracting civil marriages.

The Guardians and Wards Act of 1890 which authorized the courts to appoint guardians for minors was also applicable uniformly. Despite their limitations, the Special Marriage Act, the Indian Succession Act and the Guardians and Wards Act, provided secular and civil options to persons who did not want to be governed by religious enactments. These could have gradually developed into a comprehensive family code. But the growing resentment against the British rule and the British policy of constituting Hindus and Muslims as separate, homogeneous and antagonistic communities restricted the scope for developing uniform family laws.

SECTARIAN REFORMS WITHIN COMMUNALIZED COMMUNITIES

The events at the turn of the century brought in a sharp cleavage between the two distinct political constituencies of Hindus and Muslims. The division of Bengal, the communal riots at the close of the century and the separate electorates introduced by the Morley-Minto reforms destroyed the space for any further enactments of uniform applicability in the realm of family law.[48]

However, when women entered the political arena in response to the call given by Gandhi in the twenties, the issue of women's rights and family law reform gained prominence. Women leaders of the nationalist movement raised the demand for a comprehensive code regulating marriage, divorce and inheritance. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, Sarojinidevi Naidu, Muthulakshmimi Reddy, Begam Shah Nawaz and other prominent members of the All India Women's Conference (AIWC) were the most vocal protagonists of this demand. Lamenting the plight of women, Captain Lakshmi, a protagonist of women's rights, declared at the 1933 AIWC meet: 'The members of the Legislative Assembly who are men will not help us in bringing any drastic changes which will benefit women'. On the initiative taken by Renuka Ray, another vocal member, 24 November 1934, was declared as a legal disabilities day. The AIWC also initiated a comparative study of family laws of different communities with a view to evolving uniform family laws.[49]

The Government of India Act of 1935 provided an opportunity for nationalist leaders to legislate and regulate family relations. Using this opportunity, both the Hindu and Muslim leaders pressed for law reform within their respective personal laws, ostensibly to elevate the status of women. The issues addressed by the reforms, their impact on women's rights and the political motive beneath the reforms make interesting study.

THE HINDU WOMEN'S RIGHT TO PROPERTY ACT, 1937

The aim of the Hindu Women's Rights to Property Bill, introduced by Dr. G.V. Deshmukh, was to set right the problems created by the judicial decisions of the English courts which had constrained the scope of *stridhana* during the later phase of the nineteenth century.[50] While introducing the Bill in the Legislative Assembly, Deshmukh stated: 'The British concepts like 'reversioner', 'surrender' etc. had caused a great loss to women's right to property. The word 'reversioner' reflected an English notion peculiar to their country. From that moment, the widow began to be infested by those pests called 'reversioners'. In fact, a majority of the litigation in connection with the property of widows was by and on account of the reversioners. The reversioner could harass the widow by challenging every act of hers in dealing with the property'. Deshmukh added that the English judges had arrived at an erroneous conclusion that the temperament of the Hindu society was such that it did not want Hindu women to have absolute right in the property.[51] Through this Bill, Deshmukh hoped to achieve equality between Hindu men and women in respect of their property. Clause 3 of the bill stipulated that no person should be excluded from inheritance and partition on the basis of sex. Regarding the devolution of the property of a Hindu dying intestate, Clause 4 of the bill specifically provided that it would devolve upon the wife, mother, daughter and wife of a predeceased son along with the sons and all would have equal share in the property. Clause 5 equated the status of women to that of men and made them absolute owners of the property.[52]

The Bill met with a great deal of hostility. After prolonged debates, the provisions of the Bill granting women absolute right to property were dropped and widows were granted only a limited right of inheritance through a concept called 'widow's estate'. The provision granting daughters a share in the parental property was excluded. The right of married women to separate property under the scriptural notion of *stridhana,* which the Bill originally aimed to restore, was subverted. Women's right to property was confined within the limited sphere of inheritance rights of widows.

REFORM WITHIN ISLAM (1937 AND 1939)

Using the same opportunity, the Muslim religio-political leaders enacted two legislations which had a far reaching effect upon the Muslim communities. As mentioned earlier many communities which had converted to Islam continued their customary practices of property inheritance. The Muslim League with the support of the religious leaders, the Ulemas, initiated a legislation titled, the Application of Shariat Act, 1937, by which it would be mandatory for all Muslims to be governed by the Shariat law. The second statute, the Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act, 1939, conferred on the Muslim women a statutory right of divorce under certain specific conditions. The arguments in favour of the Application of Shariat Act 1937 were that the customary laws of inheritance based on the concept of joint family property were discriminatory against women and that application of the Shariat would raise their status. M.H.M. Abdullah who introduced the Bill in the central legislature spelt out the objectives of the Bill as follows: '...the bill aims at securing uniformity of law among Muslims in all their social and personal relations. By doing so it also recognizes and does justice to the claims of women for inheriting family property who, under customary law, are debarred from succeeding to the same. If Shariat law is applied they will automatically be entitled to inherit the same'.[53] Another Muslim member Sir Mohammad Yamin Khan stressed that Muslim women had been lobbying for the passage of the bill and pointed out that '... being Muslim why should (women) not get the benefit of Islamic law and why should they be deprived of their genuine right of inheritance on account of the customary law which gives to a man a much bigger share than what he is entitled to...(A Muslim woman) does not enjoy only the limited right of maintenance but she becomes the full owner of her property....she is under no obligation to give the property to her husband .... not even have it managed by her husband...human society must live on the right principles of equity...'.[54]

The Bill had the support of all Muslim legislators and women members. G.V. Deshmukh was another supporter of the Bill. The stated aim of the legislation was to declare that in matters relating to marriage, divorce and inheritance all Muslims would be governed by the Shariat (which is more progressive and pro-women) to the exclusion of other laws and customs throughout British India. But beneath the stated objective, the Bill also had a deeper political agenda, of unifying Muslims and strengthening the political base as well as the religious hold over the community. This was the period when the two nation theory was being formulated and within the nationalist movement there was a sharp divide between Hindu and Muslim leaders. A uniform law was viewed by the Muslim

League as an important step towards unifying the community. Since unification of Muslims was the primary aim, customs of matrilineal inheritance were opposed as vehemently as those which denied women property rights. To achieve the crucial political motive beneath the Bill, an attempt had to be made to pacify the feudal landowners who were opposed to the Bill. M.A. Jinnah, therefore, introduced an amendment to keep agrarian landholdings out of the purview of the Bill. Despite the tall claim of empowering women, women's rights were sacrificed before the political agenda.[55]

The second important legislation during this period was the Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act, 1939. As per the Shariat, on apostasy a Muslim marriage stood dissolved. Muslim women who felt trapped within oppressive marriages used the provision to dissolve their marital ties. The Act sought to arrest this trend by providing Muslim women a statutory right to divorce within their religious boundaries, thus retaining them within the Islamic fold. The Act was based on a book entitled *Al-Hilat al-Nazjizalil Halilat al-Ajizah* (a lawful divorce) published in 1932 by the renowned Islamic jurist Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanavi. In defence of women's rights, he had enumerated the principles of the Maliki law by which a court could dissolve a Muslim woman's marriage under specified conditions.[56] Based on his recommendations, a Bill was introduced in the Central Legislature by Muhammed Ahmad Kazimi in 1936.[57] The Islamic jurists, Asif Ali Fyzee and Maulana Thanavi, actively campaigned for its enactment. The Bill was supported by several non-Muslim members. The statement of objectives mentioned that the aim of the Bill was to alleviate the unspeakable misery caused to Muslim women. The Act was applicable only to women. The Muslim men's right to unilateral divorce was not affected by the reform. Again, beneath the stated aim of women's welfare lay an unstated deeper political motive of strengthening Islam. Nonetheless, it was a landmark in the history of Islamic (predominantly Hanafi) law in India.

DEBATES WITHIN THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY

The years immediately preceding independence were the years marked by the controversy around the Hindu Code Bill. The caste Hindu women had neither a right to divorce nor an absolute right of inheritance as widows or daughters. The consistent campaign by women leaders compelled the Congress to prioritize this issue. Two separate committees were set up during the forties to explore the scope of reform within the customary Hindu law, but political developments necessitated the shelving of this issue until independence.

The issue of personal laws was debated primarily in the Constituent Assembly in the context of rights of minorities within the new nation. The trauma of Partition had brought in its wake an insecure and defensive Muslim minority who had to be reassured of their right to religious and cultural freedom within the new democracy. The debates on Uniform Civil Code centred primarily on the issue of national integration. It was deemed necessary that the integrated nation should be governed by a uniform set of family laws to facilitate national unity and smooth governance. But politically it was also necessary to honour the assurance to minorities for respecting their religious and cultural identity symbolized by the continuance of their personal laws.

The clause on Uniform Civil Code became a highly contested issue and only after the rights were divided into two segments, i.e. Fundamental and Enforceable Rights (Part III of the Constitution) and Directive Principles of State Policy which were non-enforceable (Part IV of the Constitution) that the Muslim members consented to placing this clause under Part IV of the Constitution. This move was opposed by liberals within the Constituent Assembly, such as M.R. Masani, Hansa Mehta, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, K.M. Munshi, Alladi Krishnaswami Ayyar, in the context of evolving a new nationhood and ushering India into modernity. They did not address the issue of women's rights. M.R. Masani, Hansa Mehta and Rajkumari Amrit Kaur voiced their notes of dissent on the ground that, 'One of the factors that has kept India back from advancing to nationhood has been the existence of personal laws based on religion which keep the nation divided into watertight compartments in many aspects'. According to K.M. Munshi, the important point was whether 'We are going to consolidate and unify our personal law in such a way that the way of life of the whole country may in course of time be unified and (become) secular.... After all we are an advancing society. We are in a stage where we must unify and consolidate the nation by every means ...' Alladi Krishnaswami Ayyar added, 'Are we helping those factors which help the welding together into a single nation, or is this country to be kept up always as a series of competing communities'.[58] Dr. Ambedkar pointed out that the Muslim members probably had read too much into this provision which merely proposes that the State shall endeavour to secure a civil code for the citizens of the country. It does not say that after the uniform code is framed, the State shall enforce it upon all citizens merely because they are citizens. Guided by this assurance, the accepted Article 44 of the Constitution is worded as follows: *The State shall endeavour to secure for the citizens a Uniform Civil Code throughout the territory of India.*

CONCLUSIONS

It is generally believed that the interventions by the colonial state in the realm of family law were meant primarily for the liberation of Indian women from the barbaric customs of sati, female infanticide and marital rape of infant brides. It is also believed that women's right to property is a western concept introduced by the British during its modernizing mission. But such notions are proved to be totally wrong when we turn to history. It is necessary to recall that the Roman law as well as the English common law contained a number of stringent anti-women provisions and were imbued with anti-women bias. This bias crept into India through the Anglo-Saxon jurisprudence and subverted the traditional legal systems which provided women with a certain measure of economic security. The traditional systems were remoulded into linear, formal and stringent structures, which strengthened patriarchal control over women and their right to property.

The colonial interventions promoted the construction of distinct and mutually hostile religious communities of Hindus and Muslims, to be governed by their respective personal laws along the model of the canon law. The basis of the legal system was the ancient scriptures translated with a western mind set. These scriptures were never meant to be used as rigid legal principles of an adversarial legal system. The translated texts drastically changed the tone and texture of the customary and scriptural Hindu law and the Hindu woman's right to property suffered a severe set back. In the process of streamlining the pluralistic society several customary rights of women were crushed as they could not meet the legal requirement set by British courts to prove a custom. Ironically, the character of the communities was fixed and the mutually exclusive communities of Hindus and Muslims were constructed through litigation over property disputes.

The restructuring of the easily accessible non-state judicial fora, dispensing quick justice through community-based interventions, into an alien model of English courts rendered justice adversarial, expensive and dilatory. With the system of hierarchical organization of courts, the decisions of the Privy Council became binding principles of law and the process of evolving laws at the local level to suit the needs of local communities was arrested. Concepts of justice, equity and good conscience became the direct channels of introducing English laws, principles and puritanical notions of morality into India.

During the nationalistic struggle, there were some attempts to restore women's rights. The primary aim of the two legislations enacted in 1937, The Hindu Married Women's Right to Property and the Application of Shariat Act, 1937, was to partly restore women's property rights subverted through the legal precedents set by the Privy Council. Unfortunately, in a politically surcharged context these legislations brought only marginal respite.

The antagonistic relationship between majority and minority communities has not only continued in the post-independence period but has worsened in recent times. The gender card has been played by all players of the communalized politics and has now been transformed into an extremely contentious issue of identity politics. Women's rights and family law reform can no longer be viewed as a neutral terrain, isolated from contemporary political events. Within a complex social, political and economic structure, the issue of gender equality cannot be resolved by a simple, linear system of uniform rights to all women of all communities. In order to be relevant to women's lives, there is the need to contextualize family law reform within a comprehensive framework, taking into consideration political, economic and cultural diversities. By tracing its complex roots, this essay makes a modest contribution in our understanding of family laws.

NOTES

1. S.V. Desika Char, *Readings in the Constitutional History of India 1757–1947*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983, p. 294.
2. I am grateful to Amrita Shodhan for sharing with me her unpublished doctoral thesis where she has dealt with this point elaborately.
3. G.C. Rankin, *Background to India Law*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1946.
4. While enacting the Indian Contract Act, the fact that contract was initially treated as a part of personal law was conveniently overlooked and it was transformed into territorial law uniformly applicable to all British subjects.
5. While a large part of the personal laws relates to family matters, the term also applies to issues like management of Hindu religious and charitable institutions and Muslim *wakfs* as well as the Muslim law of pre-emption and the Hindu law of Damduppat.
6. See B.S. Cohn, 'Anthropological Note on Disputes and Law in India', in L. Nader (ed.), *The Ethnography of Law*, American Anthropological Association, 1965, pp. 112–113.

7. This principle was laid down in a case of guardianship, Waghela Rajsanji v Shekh Masluddin (1887) 14 IA 89.
8. I am relying upon the work of Lata Mani and Uma Chakravarty on Sati and of Lucy Carrol on Widow Remarriage. Regarding the discourse on Sati, for example, Lata Mani has commented that women were not the central concern of this debate, but rather women were the site upon which the discourse on culture and identity was debated and women's rights did not figure in this debate. See L. Mani, 'Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India' in K. Sangari, and S. Vaid (eds.), *Recasting Women, Essays in Colonial History*, New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1989, p. 88.
9. * The Caste Disabilities Removal Act 1850 set aside the provisions of Hindu Law which penalized the renunciation of religion by depriving a convert of his right in the joint family property.
   * The Hindu Inheritance (Removal of Disabilities) Act, 1928 prohibited the exclusion from inheritance of certain disqualified heirs.
   * The Hindu Gains of Learning Act 1930 stipulated that all gains of learning (income earned through professional qualifications) would be the exclusive and separate property of a Hindu male even if he had been supported to acquire professional qualifications from the funds of the joint family.
10. (1868) 10 WR 488.
11. Bhugwandeen Doobey v Myna Baee (1867) 11 MIA 487.
12. (1874) 14 BLR 159.
13. Deo Parshad v Lujoo Roy (1873) 20 WR 102.
14. Dowlut Kooer v Burma Deo Sahoy (1874) 22 WR 54.
15. Chotay Lal v Chunno Lall ILR (1879) 4 Cal 744.
16. (1886) 11 MIA 139.
17. (1903) 30 IA 202.
18. The Cutchis are originally from Sindh or Cutch and speak Cutchi language. They are believed to have been converted to Islam by Sadr Din. Although they practise Islam, their manners and customs continue to be Hindu. They believe in ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu and during the period of litigation, as per the comments of the judge, not a single person knew Arabic or Persian.
19. The first two cases concerned Khoja women, Hirbae v Sonbae and Gungbae v Sonabae. The third case was by a Cutchi Memon, Rahimatbae v Hadji Jussa & Ors
20. Hirbae v Sonbae POC (1853) p. 110 (also referred to as the Khoja's and Memon's case).
21. Ibid p. 121.
22. See K. Alladi (ed.), *Mayne's Treatise on Hindu Law & Usage*, New Delhi: Bharat Law House (13th edn), 1993, pp. 63–65.
23. J.D.M. Derrett, *Hindu Law Past and Present* , Calcutta: Mukherjee & Co., 1957, p. 78.
24. It is believed that trade routes between South India and West Asia were in existence from 10th century B.C. during the time of King Solomon and Queen Sheba. See A.M. Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India up to Sixteenth Century*, Bangalore: The Church History Association of India (1982), Vol I, p. 20. Major religions of West Asia, i.e. Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Zoroastrianism entered India through this trade route

25. Apart from Christians, the Act also protected persons converted to reformist sects like Brahmos and Arya Samajis who suffered loss of caste. The principle was first introduced through S.9 of the Regulation VII of 1832 of the Bengal Code. In 1850 the principle contained in the Bengal Code was made applicable throughout British India. It was a very brief Act consisting of only one section.
26. For instance, Part IV of the ICMA lays down special procedure for registering the marriages of native Christians.
27. See Peerozeboye v Ardaseer Cursetjee (1853) POC 57.
28. S.7 of IDA provides as follows: 'Court to act on principles of English Divorce Court'.
29. Sumathi Ammal v D. Paul AIR 1936 Mad 324 FB.
30. M.P. Jain, *Outlines of Indian Legal History*, Bombay: N.M. Tripathi (2nd edn), 1966, p. 59.
31. As per a case decided on 16 December 1817 by the Court of Appeal of Surat Adawlut Kaoosjee Roostumjee versus Mt. Awan Baee, the matters concerning marriage and control over women's sexuality were regulated by Modees, Dustoors and members of the Parsi *unjoomun* and bigamous marriages were permitted under certain conditions. The case is discussed in Mihirwanjee Nuoshirwanjee v Awan Baee Borradaile's Reports SDA Vol. I 1800-1824 pp. 231–238.
32. Succession to Parsees Immovable Property Act, 1837, Act IX of 1837.
33. The history of Parsi law reform is based on the report in S. K. Roy Chowdhury and H.D. Saharay Paruck, *The Indian Succession Act*, Bombay: N.M. Tripathi, (7th edn) 1988, p. 73.
34. Ardeseer Cursetjee v Peerozebai 6 MIA 348.
35. Matrimonial Causes Act, 1857.
36. With this, the penal provisions of bigamy under the Penal Code were made applicable to Parsis. But the Act did not have any retrospective effect and marriages contracted prior to the enactment could not be governed by the penal provisions. See S. Manchanda, *Parsi Law in India*, Allahabad: The Law Book Co. (5th edn), 1991, p. 14.
37. Dinsha Petit (Sir) v Jamsetji Jeejeebhoy (Sir) (1909) ILR 33 Bom 509.
38. Saklat v Bella 1925 ILR 53 IA 42. The court held that in a marriage between a Parsi woman and a non-Parsi man, there is a presumption that the wife will have to accept the religious faith of her husband. So it would follow that the children will be brought up according to the religion of the father.
39. This principle was borrowed from the then progressive Islamic law in 1865.
40. The Amending Act XVII of 1939.
41. The non-concurrence of the rest of the associations was explained by Sir Phiroze Sethna as 'This opposition chiefly comes from a small section who are ultra conservative in their views and do not, as a rule, approve of any changes in keeping with the changing times'.
42. LAD IV 1935 pp. 3246–3247; LAD V, 1936 pp. 4149–4153. Also see A. Parashar, Women *and Family Law Reform in India*, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1992, pp. 192–193.
43. A.M. Bhattacharjee, *Hindu Law and the Constitution*, Calcutta: Eastern Law House (2nd edn), 1994, p. 11.
44. See S. Banerjee, 'Marginalization of Women's Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Bengal' in K. Sangari, and S. Vaid (eds.) *Recasting Women, Essays in Colonial History*, New Delhi, Kali for Women, 1989, p. 127.

45. T. Sarkar, 'Rhetoric Against Age of Consent', *Economic and Political Weekly* XXVIII/ 36, 1983, p. 1870.
46. S. Chandra, 'Rukmabai: Debate over Woman's Right to Her Person', *Economic and Political Weekly* XXXI/44, 1996, p. 2927.
47. *Dadaji Bhikaji v Rukmabai* (1885) ILR 9 Bom 529.
48. S. Sarkar, *Modern India 1885–1947,* Madras: Macmillan, 1993.
49. Aparna Basu, and Bharati Ray, *Women's Struggle: A History of the AIWC 1927–1990,* Delhi: Manohar 1992, pp. 46–47.
50. K. Gill, *Hindu Women's Right to Property,* New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publications, 1986, p. 485
51. Ibid., pp. 104–107.
52. Ibid.
53. S. Lateef, 'Defining Women through Legislation', in Z. Hasan (ed.), *Forging Identities: Gender, Communities and the State,* New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1994, p. 43.
54. Ibid., p. 45
55. A. Parashar, *Women and Family Law Reform,* New Delhi: Sage Publications,1992, p. 150.
56. Ibid., p. 151.
57. F. Ahmad, 'Fatwa Needed to Make Talaq Revocable' in *The Pioneer,* Delhi 17 May 1994.
58. V. Dhagamwar, *Towards the Uniform Civil Code,* Bombay: N.M. Tripathi, 1989, pp. 2–3.

CHAPTER 2

Legislating the Family in Post-Independence India[1]

Patricia Uberoi

A GEOGRAPHY OF INDIAN KINSHIP

The Ubiquity of Patriarchy

In 1985, the Anthropological Survey of India, set up some 40 years earlier in anticipation of the challenges of nationhood, embarked upon a mammoth project to document the biological, social and cultural traits of "the peoples of India".[2] The survey began – problematically, in some reckonings – by identifying 4,635 distinct "communities" in the subcontinent. Over the next five years, some 500 scholars spent 26,510 days in the field, recording the testimony of 24,951 key informants of these communities in 3481 villages and 1011 towns and cities throughout the country. The outcome has been a score or more of state-wise community surveys, and a series of synoptic volumes on different themes, one of them an "anthropological atlas" that includes some 28 maps on various aspects of social organization.

A number of maps in the Peoples of India *Atlas* indicate a strong patrilineal emphasis throughout the subcontinent: for instance, Map 47[3] shows an overwhelming preponderance of inheritance in the male line, typically male equigeniture (3680 communities),[4] and succession through the eldest son in 4427 communities,[5] while Map 43[6] shows a strikingly similar profile in respect of the norm of patrilocality. Put together with the information that almost all communities report some kind of internal division, and that many – distributed throughout India – have a clan organization or some other type of exogamous division, one may presume that descent groups organized along patrilineal principles are a very widespread phenomenon. While the *Atlas* does not expressly map bilateral inheritance and succession (nor, for that matter, neolocality), the maps do record the small but significant presence of a matrilineal type of social organization, linked to a norm of matrilocality, in the southwest of India, especially in the present state of Kerala, as well as in the northeastern, "tribal" states.[7]

Given this picture, it is little wonder that Indian society[8] is routinely characterized as a typical and classic example of a "patriarchal" society as conventionally defined, that is, as one in which descent and group placement, inheritance and succession are all "harmoniously" in the male line; where post-marital residence is patrilocal; and where familial authority resides with the senior male members.[9] Indeed, Sir Henry Sumner Maine, the celebrated author of *Ancient Law* (1861) and a founder of anthropological kinship studies, believed that Indian customary practices, as reported by ethnographers and colonial administrators, provided living evidence of an earlier stage in the evolution of human social life.[10] This stage, which he termed "ancient society", was characterized by the social formation of the "Patriarchal Family" – "a group of men and women, children and slaves, of animate and inanimate property, all connected by common subjection to the Patriarchal Power of the chief of the household".[11] This ancient type of family was instantiated in Roman law and in the social organization of the ancient Teutonic tribes, as well as in classical Hindu law (the *dharmashastric* texts, which are the religious basis of the Hindu Joint Family).[12]

The predominance of patrilinearity throughout South Asia is not merely a quaint ethnographic fact of interest to a handful of anthropologists. On the contrary, a number of demographers and population experts see patriliny as an important "cultural" factor that can economically explain several contemporary social phenomena in South Asia, for instance, the notorious South Asian "son preference", continued excessive fertility on this account, skewed sex ratios and – related to these – women's compromised "autonomy". In a typical account (to which I too have contributed):

> *Patrilinearity* means that group membership is passed through the male line. Typically, this involves passing on the main productive assets through the male line, which constrains women's ability to be economically viable without being attached to a man. *Patrilocality* means that it is normative for couples to live in the man's home. Women have rights of maintenance as daughters in their husband's home, but they have no rights to own key productive assets such as land. The combination of rigid patrilinearity and patrilocality essentially means that women have little independent social or legal personhood.
>
> … [O]nly *men* constitute and reproduce the social order. The mother merely gives birth: it is through the father that a child acquires a social identity and is incorporated into the social order. Since only boys remain in the lineage, the significant social reproduction is that by the father of the son. Men are the fixed points in this social order, and women are the moving points because when they marry they leave their home and lineage, and are absorbed into their husband's lineage.[13]

Indeed, so tenacious is the hold of the patrilineal tradition of social organization in some societies (India, China or Korea, for example) that some scholars insist that modernization processes may actually work to *exacerbate* the pre-existing sex bias in favor of males, or to compromise any but the sternest efforts on the part of the state to enhance women's autonomy.[14]

Alternatively, the developmental state may itself be conceived as a "patriarchal" institution, articulating the "familial ideology" of patrilineal kinship through law and public policy.[15] "Familial ideology", claim two feminist legal scholars summing up the characteristics of the present-day Indian legal system, constructs women as "self-sacrificing mothers, loyal and chaste wives, [and] dutiful and virginal daughters": "Women who live up to the ideals of motherhood and womanhood are given some protection: Those who fail to measure up are penalized."[16] Similarly,

> Many aspects of legal regulation are shaped by assumptions of women's economic dependency within a patrilineal and patrilocal joint family. Within this structure, women are assumed to be economically dependent on male members of their families – fathers, husbands, adult sons....Both maintenance and property laws, as well as the legal regulation of women's work, are shaped by and serve to re-inscribe women's economic dependency.[17]

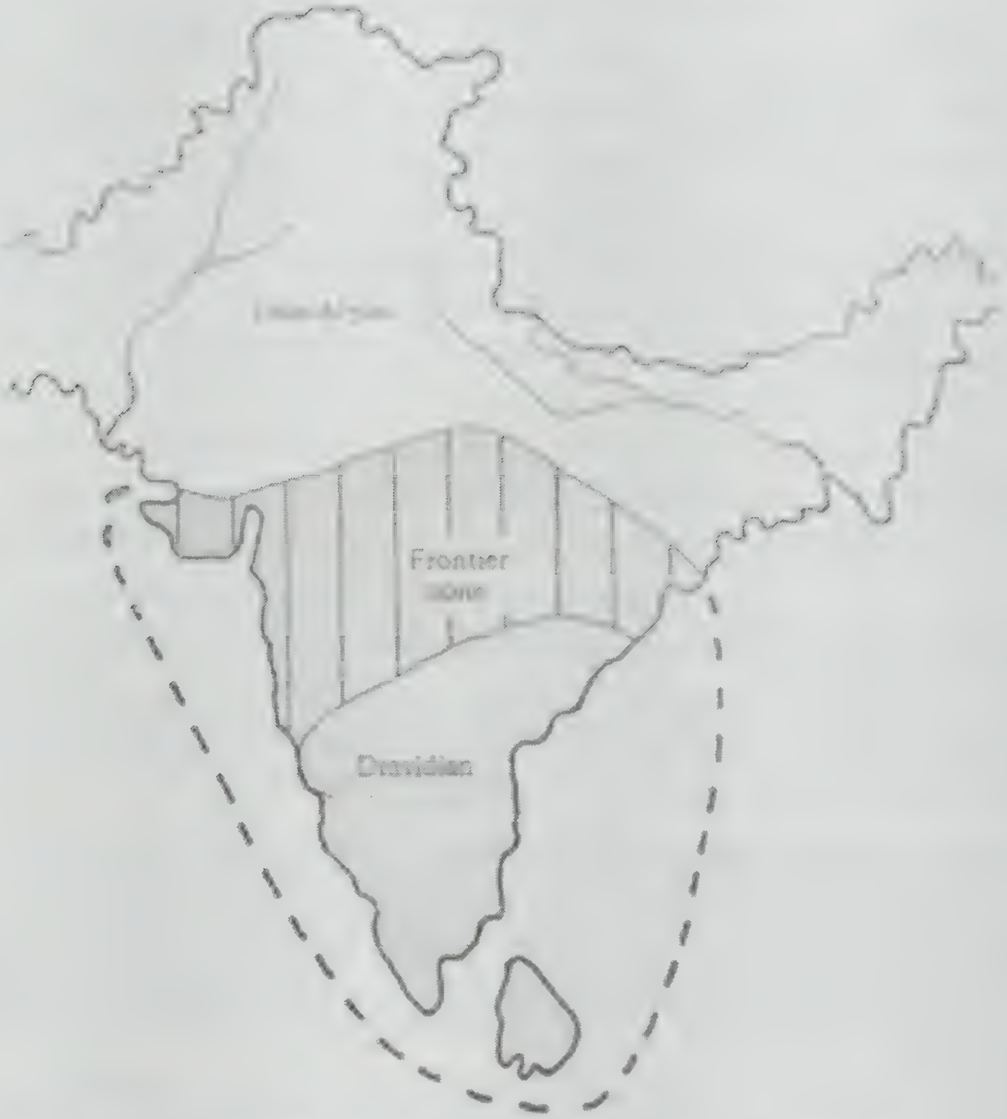
As the foregoing quotation suggests, Indian feminists have been quick to connect the conspicuous sex bias in the region with the predominance of patrilineal kinship organization. Anthropologists with feminist leanings also discern significant differences in women's status between the patrilineal and matrilineal communities within India, and between largely patrilineal India and the bilateral communities found through much of southeast Asia.[18] Thus, in both public and academic discourse in India, the notion of "patriarchy" tends to retain its original meaning, that is, *directly connecting* the descent principle with the unequal social relations of the sexes and the power of senior men over junior in the family or lineage.[19] On this asymmetrical structure may be overlaid certain features peculiar to a "caste society", for instance, the specific construction given to the ideal of women's "purity" in South Asia.[20] In the European context, by contrast, the connection between patrilineal social organization and patriarchal relations of the sexes – if it is invoked at all – is deployed to explain the "origins" of patriarchy, that is, transposed backwards into a pre-existing stage of human history.[21] In short, in the European case it is the modern *sexual division of labor* in the family and society, rather than the *rule of descent*, that defines patriarchy, whereas in the Indian case the two are seen to be intrinsically interconnected and mutually enforcing, in the present as in the past.[22]

Returning to the cartography of Indian kinship, one might say, in sum, that focus on the descent principle produces a map of India which appears largely homogeneous. Patrilineal descent, supported by the norm of patrilocal residence, is almost universal, as is the corresponding social institution of the patrilineal joint family. Seen thus, the chief problem to be explained is that of the relationship of matrilineal communities to the larger society, for instance: (i) the singularity of regions of matrilineal kinship with respect to standard development indicators, particularly those relating to the social position of women; (ii) the accommodation of matriliny to "patriarchal" Islam and Christianity; (iii) state intervention and community self-reform during the colonial and post-colonial periods; and (iv) the dynamics of the social and cultural integration of matrilineal communities into the national "mainstream" after Independence.[23]

The Variety of Marriage Rules and Practices

There are, however, *other* conceivable cartographies of Indian kinship that contrast with the relatively homogeneous picture produced by mapping the descent principle. For instance,

Figure 1
Approximate Geographical Distribution of the Dravidian and Indo-Aryan Kinship Systems

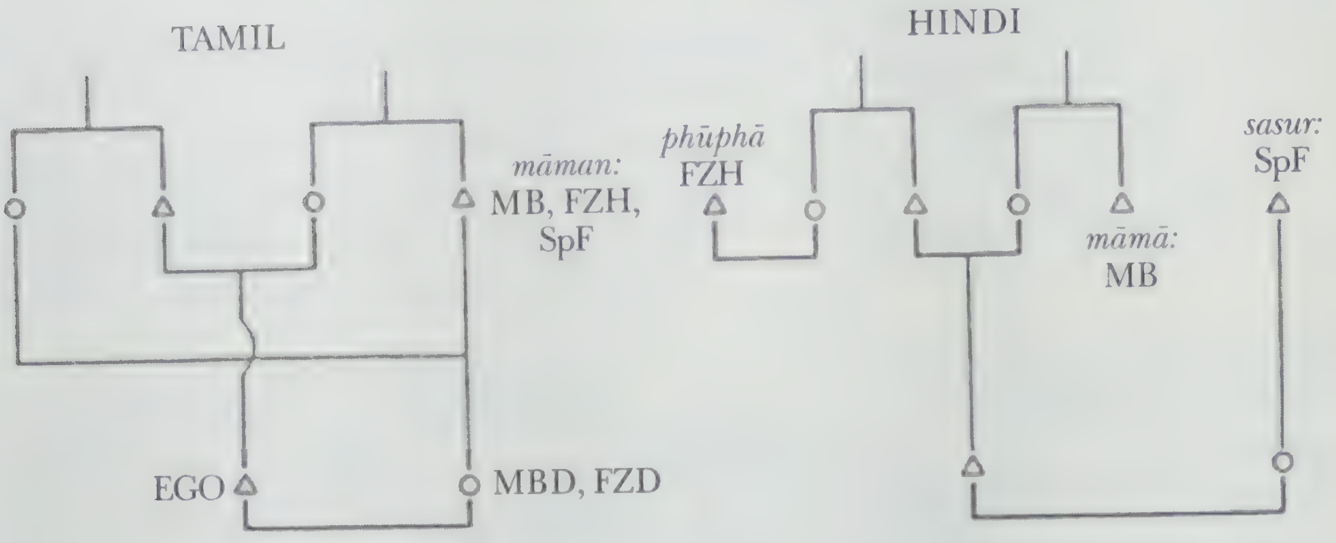


Source: Thomas R. Trautmann, "The Study of Dravidian Kinship." p. 163 in *Aryan and Non-Aryan in India*, edited by Madhav M. Deshpande and Peter Edwin Hook.

and notably, the distribution of "consanguineous marriages" as represented in the *Anthropological Atlas* shows a marked difference between the north of India, especially the northwest (disregarding the Muslim-majority state of Jammu & Kashmir), and the south (the states of Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh) in respect of the prevalence of cross-cousin marriage (marriage with the mother's brother's daughter [MBD] or father's sister's daughter [FZD]),[24] a practice conspicuous in the south but almost absent in the north (except among Muslims).[25] The regional difference is especially striking with regard to uncle-niece marriage (of the mother's brother-[elder] sister's daughter type [MB-eZD]).[26]

As it happens, the regional differentiation in marriage preferences corresponds roughly with the distribution of language families and major languages in the subcontinent.[27] In brief, the conspicuous feature of the language map of India is the north-south distribution of Indo Aryan and Dravidian languages, a division which is *also* manifested in distinctively structured kinship terminologies. Leaving aside here the Munda (Austro-Asiatic), Sino-Tibetan, and other exceptional cases, Indian kinship terminologies are polarized between

Figure 2
Tamil and Hindi Kinship Terms for Mother's Brother, Father's Sister's Husband, and Spouse's Father



Notation: F = father, M = mother, B = brother, Z = sister, H = husband, W = wife, S = son, D = daughter
Source: Thomas R. Trautmann, "The Study of Dravidian Kinship." p. 159 in *Aryan and Non-Aryan in India*, edited by Madhav M. Deshpande and Peter Edwin Hook.

an Indo-Aryan type (north India) and a Dravidian type (south India), with a "frontier zone" of mixed features between the two (Indo-Aryan vocabulary/Dravidian structure; Dravidian vocabulary/Indo-Aryan structure) (see Figure 1). In a general sort of way, these differential kinship semantics find reflection in different kinship practices and rules of behavior, notably in respect of marriage.

Generically speaking, as Thomas Trautmann has argued,[28] the structure of the Dravidian type of kinship vocabulary presumes a rule of sister exchange or, in anthropological terms, a rule of bilateral cross-cousin marriage, matched by a corresponding proscription on parallel cousin marriage (marriage with FBD or MZD). (Cousin marriages of *all types* are prohibited in the north.) The hypothesized Dravidian rule survives intact, or in a modified (unilateral) form in the kinship terminologies of present-day Dravidian speakers (see Figure 2), with their marked cross/parallel distinctions. It is represented also – to a greater or lesser extent – in their kinship practices. Of course, for a variety of reasons, including demographic contingency, practice nowhere accords fully with the "rule", and one finds instances of marriages in the region of Dravidian kinship (i) that conform to rule only by extension (marriage with "classificatory", not "real", cross-cousins); (ii) that contradict the rule; or (iii) that can be construed as both conforming to and contravening the rule, depending on which way the kinship connection is traced.[29] Similarly, in the region of north Indian kinship, marriages may in fact take place in disregard of the rules which, as we will see, disallow not only cross-cousin marriage but also intermarriage within a much wider, bilateral circle of kin. Limitations of choice (e.g. the need to arrange a marriage with "known" families; very narrowly defined caste-endogamous boundaries; inflated rates of dowry, etc.) and considerations of caste status are among the reasons commonly cited for the infringement of exogamous rules in the north.

The special features of Dravidian kinship – at least as these are formally articulated through the kinship terminologies of languages of the Dravidian language family – had also been noted by nineteenth century scholars like Lewis Henry Morgan, another of the founders of anthropological kinship studies. For Morgan, the "discovery" of the terminology of Dravidian kinship was the final piece of evidence he required to figure out the basic "systems of consanguinity" of the human family and the genetic relationships between them,[30] linking the social organization of speakers of Dravidian languages with that of the Iroquois and other native peoples of North America.

As is well known, Morgan's work has left a mixed legacy in anthropological kinship studies.[31] On the one hand, it has been derided for its "speculative" historicism; on the other hand, it has proved to be the inspiration for formal kinship semantics as well as the impetus for structural-functionalist investigations of the relationship between kinship terminologies and kinship practices. In the Indian context, additionally, Morgan's work has inspired a number of attempts to reconstruct an original "Indo-Aryan" kinship system through the evidence of the classical legal sources, the Sanskrit Dharmashastras. The writings of G.S. Ghurye and his associates and pupils come to mind here.[32]

In her long standard, but latterly rather neglected work, *Kinship Organization in India* (originally published in 1953), Ghurye's student Irawati Karve drew on the evidence of kinship terminologies in the first instance, and the ethnographic record by way of supplement, to differentiate four main varieties of kinship organization in the Indian subcontinent, coordinating with the distribution of language families. The major division, and the chief focus of Karve's attention, was that between (1) the North Indian or "Indo-Aryan" system, which she saw as continuous with the model represented in the classical Sanskrit legal texts; and (2) the southern region of "Dravidian" kinship. Between these two she posited (3) a "Central" kinship zone with mixed features, covering Maharashtra, Gujarat and parts of Rajasthan through Madhya Pradesh to Orissa, while (4) a non-contiguous "Eastern" zone, effectively a residual category in her scheme, included speakers of the Sino-Tibetan and Austro-Asiatic language families.[33]

For Karve, as indeed for others who have focused on the differentiation of North and South Indian kinship, the intellectual problem and heroic challenge was that of explaining the unity of the two systems, notwithstanding their typological and generic differentiation. Karve's answer was, simply, that these differences pertained within the overall cultural unity provided by the twin institutions of the *Hindu caste system* and the *Hindu joint family.*[34] Other scholars have proposed somewhat different solutions to this conundrum in a debate that dominated the field of Indian family and kinship studies through several decades.[35] Be that as it may, we note here, simply, that Karve's differentiation of north and south Indian kinship centered in particular on the fact that the Dravidian system allows (indeed it positively enjoins) marriages with certain types of close kin that are prohibited as marriage partners in the north. Along with this go certain other kinship practices that are believed to entail a moderation of the strongly patrilineal emphasis of the north Indian Indo-Aryan system. For instance, north Indian customary rules of exogamy not only require a ban on marriages within the patrilineal localized descent group, but sometimes extend this exogamous prohibition to cover *all* co-villagers, whether distantly or only putatively related under the same patronymic, or completely unrelated (see below); in south India, by contrast, intra-village marriage is generally permitted. Thus, in the north, women typically marry total strangers, at a considerable distance, and thereafter take up residence with their husbands' families, whereas in the southern kinship system women may marry within the kin-network, possibly within the same village, and have greater flexibility in regard to post-marital residence arrangements. Add to this the higher prevalence of dowry marriage in the north, and you have there a family system which is qualitatively and experientially different from that in the south, at least from a woman-centered perspective.

Karve's picture of regional differentiation in kinship practices was further amplified by anthropologist Pauline Kolenda in a series of papers from 1967.[36] Utilizing materials from a number of ethnographic studies of the 1950s, along with household and other information from the 1961 Census, Kolenda's main purpose was to correlate the incidence of different family forms – particularly the patrilineal joint family – with factors such as caste status, size of land-holding, and rural/urban residence. To these she added a set of proxy-measures of women's domestic "bargaining power", referring to the emotional or material leverage that a young married woman might bring to bear on her husband to persuade him to set up house independently of his patrikin:[37] high or low rates of divorce and remarriage; bridewealth or dowry payments; and stronger or weaker ties with the wife's kin (uxorilaterality *versus* virilaterality).[38] Kolenda's studies indicated the higher prevalence of joint families in the northern zone; conversely, factors enhancing women's bargaining power appeared to be stronger in the south. As she also noted, these regional differences in the prevalence of the joint family appeared to correlate with certain other significant social phenomena that are now regarded as indicators of "social development".[39]

REGIONAL KINSHIP PATTERNS AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT INDICATORS

Though Karve and Kolenda were chiefly interested in investigating patterns of family and kinship *per se*, focus on the regional dimension of family practices has subsequently been co-opted to other, and wider, explanatory ends. In the first place, it has been used to explain regional patterns of demographic behavior. "The main states of India", Dyson and Moore wrote in an exceedingly influential paper in 1983,

> can be broadly grouped into *two basic demographic regions*. In contrast to the north, states in the south and east are characterized by the following: relatively low overall fertility; lower marital fertility; later age at first marriage; lower infant and child mortality; comparatively low rates of female to male infant and child mortality, and, largely as a consequence, relatively low [male to female] sex ratios.[40]

Dyson and Moore related these differences in demographic behavior to the different levels of "female autonomy" enabled by the respective family and kinship systems: low in the north, higher in the south.

Subsequent studies[41] have in general endorsed Dyson and Moore's observations, while refining the notion of demographic zones,[42] and seeking to account, in one way and another, for apparent anomalies in the data. In particular, as indicated earlier, the regional asymmetry of sex ratios is an issue that has attracted much scholarly attention – from demographers and economists, and, of course, from feminists.[43] Sex ratios are generally female-adverse throughout South Asia, as they are also in some other patrilineal societies like China and Korea. But what is notable all the same is the distinct regional differentiation between north and northwestern India on the one hand, and south and east India on the other. This clearly calls for explanation *beyond patriliny*, that is, in (i) some other endogenous feature of the kinship system (such as marriage rules and practices); (ii) in kinship-related social practices (e.g. women's inheritance rights, or female seclusion [purdah]); (iii) in other exogenous factors of society, polity and economy; or (iv) in some mix of these features.

A major demonstration of the homology between regional patterns of kinship and marriage and other factors that may enable or inhibit women's "bargaining position" in the family and society is offered in economist Bina Agarwal's carefully documented *A Field of One's Own: Women and Land Rights in South Asia* (1994). This study seeks to map women's customary and statutory rights of inheritance in South Asia (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka), specifically, their rights of inheritance in *arable land*, which is the most important resource and chief means of livelihood for some three-quarters of the region's population. Agarwal's study reveals a noticeable north/south India dichotomy, women in the south being more likely to inherit land under customary law as wives or as daughters, or to be apportioned land as dowry. She found a similar patterning, too, in respect of a number of other factors that may affect women's bargaining position in the family: (i) post-marital residence; (ii) close kin marriage; (iii) purdah practices; (iv) controls over women's sexuality and freedom of divorce and remarriage; (v) rural female labor force participation rates; (vi) rural literacy rates; (vii) total fertility rates; and, rather more problematically in my opinion, (viii) measures of land scarcity. Taken together, Agarwal suggests, south India has customarily allowed women superior access to material resources, resulting in their better bargaining power in the family and better leverage in availing of the gender-equal inheritance rights that were provided in the Hindu Succession Act (HSA) of 1956. The crucial factor in Agarwal's account is the distinctiveness of the south Indian kinship system (specifically, the different rules of marriage and norms of post-marital residence), along with the co-presence of pockets of matrilineal and bilateral succession in the southern region, stretching down into Sri Lanka.

A number of other economists have drawn attention to regional differences in respect of a range of indicators of social development, gender equity, and distributive justice. On measures of female literacy and levels of education, health delivery, maternal and child survival, male and female life expectancy and, of course, sex ratios, southern India – and most notably the southwestern state of Kerala – has an outstanding profile in comparison to the north and northwestern states.[44] Reflecting on this phenomenon in the light of the revelations in the 2001 Census of an increased anti-female sex bias in natality and post-natal child mortality, Amartya Sen has spoken of "something of a social and cultural divide across India".[45] Even the "partial misfit" in the picture, the state of Tamil Nadu, does not really detract from the "astonishing finding" that

> the vast majority of the Indian States *fall firmly into two contiguous halves*, classified broadly into the north and the west, on the one side, and the south and the

> east, on the other. Indeed, every State in the north and the west … has [a] strictly lower female-male ratio of children than has every State in the east and the south…, and this indeed is quite remarkable.[46]

LEGISLATING MARRIAGE

It will be clear from the above, albeit cursory, survey of a truly vast literature, that social scientists have placed considerable explanatory weight on aspects of kinship and marriage as factors accounting for differential regional patterns of demographic behavior and economic and social development in South Asia. In this light it is interesting to see how, if at all, these regional diversities have been accommodated and articulated in the politico-legal regime of post-Independence India.

As is well known, the enactment of the new Hindu Law Code in the mid-1950s was a tremendously controversial affair that stretched over more than a decade.[47] The process had begun, piecemeal as it were, with the nineteenth and early twentieth century social reform movements, and consequent legislative enactments in British India and in "progressive" native states like Mysore and Baroda. The demand for a comprehensive Code for all Hindus and for all aspects of Hindu personal law came as a recommendation of the B.N. Rau Committee, constituted in 1941 to consider lacunae in the Hindu Women's Rights to Property Act (1937). The work of the Committee was stayed by War, resuming in 1944, and the Report eventually submitted to the Legislative Assembly in 1947. The Hindu Code was hotly but intermittently debated through the next four years, ultimately provoking the Law Minister, B.R. Ambedkar, to resign in protest against what he believed to be deliberate delaying tactics motivated by narrow electoral calculations.

The family law Bills were taken up once again following the first general elections and the constitution of the new Parliament. The Special Marriage Bill was presented first, and the expressly Hindu personal law divided into four separate Bills, the better to ensure their smooth passage through the House: The Special Marriage Act (SMA) and The Hindu Marriage Act (HMA) were passed in 1954 and 1955 respectively, to be followed by The Hindu Succession Act, The Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act and The Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act, all in 1956. Here we are concerned primarily with certain provisions of the Special Marriage Act and the Hindu Marriage Act which bear on South Indian marriage practices.

The purposes of the two Acts were rather different. The SMA was essentially a reenactment of the 1872 Special Marriage Act,[48] retaining a notable penalty of the earlier Act, namely, severance of the parties from Joint Family property.[49] ("Either he should have the wife or the property", as one unsympathetic Member put it.[50]) The SMA was billed as a secular and territorial law of marriage and divorce which, notwithstanding its problems, was still "a step in the right direction" towards the ultimate goal of a Uniform Civil Code.[51] It would encourage frugal marriage ceremonies, rather than the extravagant festivities associated with religious rituals,[52] and contribute to national unity by enabling inter-caste and inter-religious marriages.[53] Changing socio-political circumstances commended a new, "progressive" and "contractual" approach to marriage.[54] "Democracy", said D.C. Sharma during consideration of the Bill, "means freedom of choice":

> We can choose in marriage anybody we like. I think this Bill gives us that freedom of choice. This is a freedom which cannot be denied to men and women. It cannot be denied to persons when they receive high education, when they are brought up in a democratic atmosphere, and when they are taught that they should love freedom. If they can have political freedom in other spheres of life, I do not see why they should not have freedom in their choice of partners.[55]

The explicit and stated purposes behind the promulgation of the Hindu Law Code were to bring "certainty" into the operation of Hindu law; to "unify" the various schools of classical and customary law; to eliminate restrictive practices and antiquated rules; and – at least for some – to provide a benchmark of progressive legislation en route to the Uniform Civil Code.[56] Specifically, the HMA sought: (i) the abolition of caste [endogamy] as a necessary requirement of a valid marriage; (ii) the enforcement of monogamy; and (iii) the facility for divorce or the dissolution of marriage on certain grounds.[57] The "monogamy" and "divorce" provisions were the heart of the controversy over the Bill: the former because it interfered with a "right" to which a section of Hindu men felt entitled (whether by "tradition" or by comparison with the rights of Muslim men); the latter because it was seen to controvert the indissoluble, "sacramental" character of Hindu marriage. Nonetheless, Law Minister Pataskar took pains to assure the House that this legislation was in conformity with the principles of Hindu Law which, he claimed, had always adapted to changed circumstances, and that it in no way aimed to violate the sanctity of Hindu marriage.[58]

The Parliamentary debates around these legislative enactments, which occupied much of the time of the House through 1954/55, provide ample evidence of the contradictory ideological and regional pressures at work in the production of a new personal law regime for independent India. After considering these debates in some detail, I refer briefly to case law relevant to the exogamic principles enunciated in the SMA and the HMA: *briefly*, for the reason that the de-legitimization of Dravidian marriage and its allowance by "custom" have given rise to remarkably little case law. This itself is a matter for some puzzlement, for in this highly litigious society, such silence is virtually thunderous.

Marriage Rules under Classical Hindu Law

Before discussing the post-Independence legislation and the public discourse that it generated, mention should be made of the rules of marriage under classical Hindu law. This is not to claim that the Dharmashastric rules have been observed in practice: they certainly have not. Nor, *strictly* speaking, are they relevant to interpretation of points of law under the HMA, which provides its own definitions of the relevant concepts.[59] All the same, it is important to recognize that the codification of Anglo-Hindu law in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and the subsequent enactment of a *Hindu* Law Code in post-Independence India (along with a secular and territorial marriage law), have consolidated the legal recognition of the Dharmashastras as the authoritative source of the governing principles of family law for all Hindus.[60] It is another matter that some scholars are convinced that *genuine* Hindu law, as transmitted by the *rishis* [Hindu sages], is for all practical purposes a dead letter![61]

In short, the Hindu law books do not speak with one voice on the rules of marriage – as on any other matter. There are substantive differences between the Mitakshara and Dayabhaga Schools, and between different texts and commentaries. Additionally, since the nineteenth century, the practice of "Anglo-Hindu" law has generated its own body of authoritative texts and legal precedents, modified piecemeal by reformist legislation. Some cautious generalizations may be made, however:[62]

(1) Classical Hindu law recognized eight forms of marriage with different legal entailments – four of them "approved" forms, and four "unapproved". However, only two of these forms were deemed pertinent under Anglo-Hindu law, the other six being declared "obsolete". These were the prestigious *Brahma* form, an approved form in which the bride is gifted in marriage without her guardian receiving any consideration from the bridegroom (effectively, "dowry marriage"); and the unapproved and socially reprobated *Asura* form, which is marriage with brideprice. The unapproved *Gandharva* form of marriage, a voluntary union of a young man and woman sprung from sexual desire (now often glossed as "love marriage"), was recognized only grudgingly, and only in some jurisdictions.

(2) Classical Hindu law also commended marriage within the same *varna* (class) and *jati* (caste): indeed, the Hindu "caste system" as a hierarchical ordering of social groups depends crucially on the practice of caste-endogamous marriage. Nonetheless, inter-*jati* marriages within the same *varna* were usually considered to be valid in law, as were inter-*varna* marriages, *provided that* the man was of superior status to the woman (*anuloma*, "with the grain"), the children of such unions being assigned an intermediate caste status.[63] *Pratiloma* marriage, that is, marriage between a lower caste man and a higher caste woman was deemed invalid, a distinction upheld by the British courts which spent much time adjudicating on the validity (or otherwise) of inter-*varna* and inter-caste marriages and on the legal entitlements of the children of mixed unions.

(3) Additionally, and this is our major concern in this paper, classical Hindu law specified certain rules of exogamy which were quite extensive in their range of prohibitions – "extravagant", Louis Dumont termed them.[64] Firstly, intermarriage was banned between kin in the patrilineal line of descent from putative *gotra* and *pravara* ancestors.[65] The *gotras*, 18 in all, are exogamous patrilineal clans whose members claim descent from eponymous Hindu Sages, while the *pravara* are similarly exogamous units, subordinate to the *gotra*, to which they are complexly related.[66] Properly speaking, the *gotras* and *pravaras* are restricted to Brahmins, and only by courtesy, so to speak, extended to the second and third classes (*varna*) of the Hindu caste order.[67]

Secondly, marriage was prohibited between persons in a *sapinda* or "shared body" relationship with each other. The concept of *sapinda* relationship defines graded responsibilities in ancestor worship and death rituals and, relatedly, entitlements to inheritance. In these contexts it is exclusively, or almost exclusively, agnatic. However, in the context of defining the boundaries of the exogamous group, *sapinda*-ship takes on a cognatic dimension, with just a slight prioritization of agnatic kinship in the limit of recognition of seven degrees of relationship on the father's side *versus* five on the mother's.[68] Unlike *gotra* and *pravara* affiliation, the relationship of shared body is universal, not restricted to Brahmins.[69] It is this [*a*]*sapinda* rule that is hostile to the Dravidian practice of cross-cousin marriage.

Numerous Dharmashastric texts expressly prohibit cross-cousin marriage. Prominent among them, and much cited in this regard, is the *Baudhayana Dharma Sutra* (*ca* 500–200 BC), which concedes that MBD and FZD marriages are among the cultural peculiarities of South India. While local custom should, in general, be taken as authoritative – and this principle has been invoked by several authorities to justify Dravidian marriage practices – *Baudhayana* himself rules that such practices are contrary to the Veda, and should be prohibited.[70] On the other hand, other jurists, notably Madhava (*ca* 1350), have argued that cross-cousin marriage is allowable *not only* on grounds of regional "custom" practiced by "the learned", but also for the reason that marriage in any of the four approved forms, that is, involving *kanyadana* (the symbolic "gift" of the bride, laden with jewels, in tribute to a ritual superior), transubstantiates the bride from a *sapinda* of her father to a *sapinda* of her husband: the bride becomes, as the phrase has it, of "one body" with her husband.[71] By this rather convoluted logic, *both* cross-cousins (MBD and FZD) are defined as non-*sapindas* and therefore marriageable – provided, of course, that the marriage is in the appropriate form. So too, logically speaking, is the elder sister's daughter.[72]

Here, in sum, we have the complex legacy that confronted the law makers attempting to codify a uniform Hindu personal law for independent India: a tension between agnatic and cognatic concepts of relatedness; between notions of immutable law and mutable custom; and between different and contradictory renditions of the classical law, some traditions of which found means to justify the distinctive practices of Dravidian kinship.

Prohibited Relations under the Special Marriage Act (1954) and the Hindu Marriage Act (1955)

By 1954–55, caste endogamy was no longer a requirement for a valid Hindu marriage. Nor was the principle of *gotra* exogamy.[73] Hindu reformers had long argued that the primitive eugenic wisdom of the *asagotra* rule made no sense in modern times.[74] It might needlessly inhibit, say, the marriage of a Kashmiri brahmin with a Tamil brahmin if both happened to be of the same *gotra*, though they could not conceivably be close blood relations. However, both the SMA and the HMA, albeit on different grounds and in different terms, laid down certain exogamous requirements for valid marriage.

Section 4(d) of the SMA specifies that a marriage may be solemnized between two persons *if, inter alia*, "the parties are not within the degrees of prohibited relationship". To this is appended the proviso:

> Provided that where a custom governing at least one of the parties permits of a marriage between them, such marriage may be solemnized, notwithstanding that they are within the degrees of prohibited relationship.[75]

Schedule I of the Act lists the specific kin who fall under "prohibited degrees of relationship" from the viewpoint of the husband and wife respectively. These are (in anthropological terms): opposite sex lineal ascendants or descendants in three generations;

the spouses of same sex lineal ascendants and descendants; siblings; nephews and nieces; aunts and uncles; and matrilateral and patrilateral parallel- and cross-cousins. In short, the SMA expressly prohibited, among others, the typical forms of south Indian marriage alliance (MBD, FZD and eZD marriages), which were "saved" by "custom" only through a 1963 amendment to the Act[76] that brought the SMA into line with the HMA in this regard.

The HMA scheme of prohibited relationships overlaps to a large extent with that of the SMA, though it tackles the question of exogamy a little differently. On the one hand, the HMA disallows marriage between persons "within the prohibited degrees of relationship, unless the custom or usage governing each of them permits of a marriage between the two".[77] Unlike the SMA, the HMA does not provide a Schedule listing the prohibited partners, but provides a genealogical calculus. Perhaps this was the outcome of legislators' earlier criticism of the lists of "prohibited relationships" in the SMA: They argued that it was an insult to intelligence to prohibit, for instance, the marriage of a man with his great grandmother; and an insult to Hindu wisdom to mindlessly copy British legislation when Hindu law had already developed a comprehensive approach to exogamy.[78] While both the SMA and the HMA prohibit marriage with lineal ascendants or descendants or their spouses (as the case may be),[79] the HMA expands this scheme to include also certain affines – "the wife of the brother or of the father's brother or mother's brother or of the grandfather or grandmother's brother of the other".[80] The operative provision from the viewpoint of Dravidian kinship, however, is Section 3 (g) (d) of the Act, which prohibits marriage between two persons "if the two are brother and sister, *uncle and niece*, aunt and nephew, or *children of brother and sister* or of two brothers or of two sisters" (emphasis added). The inclusion in the list of prohibited relationships of the children of brother and sister was apparently a change made by the Joint Committee of the two Houses of Parliament before the reintroduction of the Bill into the Lok Sabha in 1955.[81]

Secondly, and this is another point of departure from the SMA, the HMA prohibits marriage of persons who are *sapindas* of each other, *again*, "unless a custom or usage governing each of them permits of a marriage between the two".[82] The invocation of the concept of *sapinda*-ship, which is one of the few features that distinguish this Act as "Hindu" law from its purported model in the British Matrimonial Causes Act 1950, unambiguously prohibits Dravidian cross-cousin and uncle-niece marriage. Though the limits of *sapinda*-ship are reduced from the classical 7/5 model to just five generations in the line of ascent through the father and three through the mother,[83] the prohibition nonetheless includes quite a broad range of agnatic *and* cognatic kin.[84] It is still needlessly comprehensive, in some opinions.[85]

In sum, then, cross-cousin and uncle-niece marriages are *doubly* prohibited in the HMA, to be saved only by "custom" or "usage", which must be longstanding, continuous, reasonable, and not opposed to public policy.[86] Significantly, in this case too, the allowance of "custom" was not originally conceded in the Hindu Code Bill, but clearly emerged through processes of political negotiation and compromise, the precise details of which remain obscure.

PROHIBITED INCEST OR ALLOWABLE CUSTOM?

It would have been obvious from the foregoing account of legal provisions and the legislative process that an intense struggle had been going on in the public domain – and no doubt even more behind the scenes – over the legitimacy of Dravidian marriage practices. In this section, we review some of the arguments for and against Dravidian marriage put forward in the course of parliamentary debates on the "prohibited relationship" clauses of the SMA and the HMA.

Although the stated purposes of the two Acts were rather different, as noted, arguments on the clauses overlapped to a considerable degree; the *dramatis personae* were in many cases the same people, reiterating well-rehearsed positions; and arguments that, properly speaking, pertained to the HMA were brought up in connection with the SMA, this being the first presented Bill. The fact that two Hindus could choose to be married under either Act[87] further complicated matters, since legislators were acutely aware that the provisions of the one might undermine the legislative intent of the other.[88] Thus, there was constant cross-referencing between the two Bills, and to the anticipated provisions of the Hindu laws of succession, adoption and maintenance, still to come.

The debate on "prohibited degrees of relationship" was articulated primarily as a debate on the role of "custom" and "usage" in the legal regime of post-Independence India; an important subsidiary theme, however, was the science of eugenics. The "saving" of "custom" – and the reference was *especially* to Dravidian marriage practices – was a zigzag process. Allowance of custom was first an amendment proposed to the SMA, clause 4 (d). It was stoutly resisted by the Government[89] and outvoted in the House, although pre-Act marriages in contravention of the clause could still be *registered* under the Act[90] (an anomaly that alert legislators did not fail to notice). Meanwhile, however, a proviso regarding "custom" had been added to the "prohibited relationship" clauses of the HMA and within a few months, appearing to contradict itself, the Government defended this proviso against spirited criticism and numerous amendments calling for its deletion. Finally, in 1963, the SMA was amended[91] to make provision for "custom" after all, citing as justification the precedent of the HMA.[92] It was altogether a peculiar story.

One set of arguments on degrees of "prohibited relationships" revolved around the nature of the SMA, in contradistinction to the HMA. Was the SMA to be seen as a "special" Act, meant just for the few citizens seeking to contract inter-religious marriages? If so, the majority of citizens would continue to marry under Hindu law, where "custom" had a recognized role. Or was the SMA a progressive, secular and territorial law for modern times which would seek to bring ever larger number of citizens under its sway? If so, it would need to come to an expedient accommodation with customary practices, at least in the short run.[93] The irony of the situation was not lost on critics of the proposed SMA amendment. Love of one's own customs and usages was understandable, Hindu Mahasabha Member V.G. Deshpande conceded, but

> You are doing away with the [Hindu religious] marriage ceremonies, you are doing away with the sacred fire, you are doing away with all this sacred vow, but you are sticking to all kinds of customs which we do not know, and parading in this House that you are introducing a uniform civil law for the whole country, and that a model system of marriage is being introduced.[94]

The whole idea was "ridiculous", he said.

Similar arguments were advanced on behalf of the HMA clause on "prohibited relationships": If the aim of the Code was to unify, clarify and reform the Hindu law of marriage, why should deviant customs be given recognition? Pandit Thakur Das Bhargava was among the vehement critics of the introduction of a "custom" clause into the HMA. What is the use of a Hindu Law, he asked, where "any person can marry any person and may divorce in any manner he pleases?"[95]

> In [the HMA] clause 2 [on the application of the Act] we say that it is binding on all and in the rest of the clauses we say it is not binding on all the Hindus. They can have their own customs. My submission is that we should be consistent and logical. Let us do the right thing *which will bring about solidarity among the Hindus in India.* We should have a law which will bind all people.[96]

Other parliamentarians were quite explicit that marriage practices in contravention of the *shastras* (and also of north Indian norms) should *not* be allowed under the HMA, or indeed under the SMA as well. They argued that even a secular, territorial law must endorse the principle of sacramental marriage "that has ruled our country for at least 5,000 years": "Are you passing this legislation", asked N.C. Chatterjee in debate on the SMA, "following India's *Swadharma*, India's tradition? ....We must keep our own culture, our *dharma*, that is, the essence of our being, our inborn nature, and we have to assimilate it and re-create our own country, our Indian society, on its old, own moorings."[97] Just see what has happened in Western countries, he added for good measure: not the "progress" but the "degradation" of womenfolk.[98] Also speaking on behalf of Hindu ideals and sentiment, Mulchand Dube reiterated Chatterjee's point:

> This [SMA] is a piece of social legislation and I take it that the object of all social legislation should be to promote unity and solidarity in the society. Now, the two parts of the Schedule mentioned in the Special Marriage Bill permit marriage between persons *which would otherwise be prohibited according to Hindu sentiment.* For instance, the children of cousins can inter-marry. *This kind of thing is repugnant to Hindu society....* [T]he persons who undertake such marriages ... would not only incur the contempt of the rest of society, but this kind of thing may create antagonism and be the cause of disruption of their society. So my submission is that the sentiments of the people who are likely to be affected thereby should receive primary consideration, and *if such a thing is incestuous or repugnant to the sentiments of Hindus,* there is no reason why this should be introduced at the present stage.[99]

Almost a decade later, U.M. Trivedi spoke in almost the same terms in opposing the 1963 SMA Amendment:

> Generally among the Hindus – leave alone the customs pertaining in some parts of South India – *it was always considered derogatory, most derogatory and most heinous, for any man to conceive of an idea of marrying his own sister* – sister in that sense includes maternal uncle's daughter, paternal uncle's daughter or aunt's daughter.

> To marry a sister like that was considered most abominable in North India. In North India nobody would conceive such an idea.[100]

Moreover, as other speakers pointed out, if you make an exception for "custom" in one case, where does this end?

> Some hon friends said that there is a custom among certain sections of the people of marrying [the] maternal uncle's daughter. If these customs are allowed, not only will one be able to marry the maternal uncle's daughter, but he would be able to marry his own sister's daughter, who is considered by some people to be one's own daughter. Not only that: there are customs prevalent among certain communities whereby one can marry the paternal uncle's daughter and sometimes also the sister of half-blood. So it would mean that all these marriages would be allowed. If you allow all these marriages, then there is no use incorporating this provision regarding prohibited degrees of relationship in the [Special Marriage] Bill.[101]

Indeed, as Tek Chand, another active North Indian participant in all these debates put it,

> Custom may be an absurd sort of custom; custom may be that of the *Vam Margis* [Tantric "left-handed" cults] who do not recognize the degree of prohibited relationship. Nevertheless, they have only got to show that it is their custom, whether it is immoral or vicious, whether it is reprehensible or unacceptable to you, or whether it is intolerable. Nonetheless, it is their custom, and you jolly well have to tolerate it.[102]

The ultimate argument for a comprehensive schedule of "prohibited relationships" was that of "eugenics". No particular scientific authorities were cited in this regard: it was taken to be common knowledge that the universal "horror of incest" was based on established principles of eugenic science. If "custom" were to be allowed, medical doctor Jaisoorya said

> There will be no end to concessions to all sorts of customary laws, and the very purpose and spirit of this Bill will be lost. Do you believe that there is no such thing as eugenics, that eugenics is all bunk? In the ancient Egyptian empire, the Egyptian kings married their own sisters. There is no evidence that it was bad.[103] Where are you going to put a stop to all this? It is incestuous. Marriage with your niece is incestuous, whether you call it customary law or not; marriage with your cousin is incestuous, whether you call it customary law or not.[104]

In fact, it was quite probable, asserted one Member early on in the debates, that consanguine marriages, such as "are obtainable amongst the Semitic people, amongst the Arabic people, etc.", result in excessive fertility and spell "ruin" for a country already overpopulated.[105]

For the most part, South Indians (and other advocates of the "custom" clauses) did not contest the eugenic argument: some of them even added their own evidence of the general ill-effects of such practices.[106] They simply argued that such marriages should be legally permitted in a "transitional" society until such time as people could be "educated" into *voluntarily* giving them up – an uphill task, apparently[107] – or the customs declined in the natural course.[108] A rare note of defiance on behalf of Dravidian marriage was struck by Dr. Rama Rao. Speaking as a medical man, he maintained that there was no conclusive scientific evidence to substantiate the harmful effects of consanguineous marriage: in any case, Parliament was not "a scientific body deciding eugenics".[109] "I want to appeal to our North Indian friends", he said,

> not to have a stone curtain before their eyes but to see beyond the Vindhyas [the mountain range that is taken to divide North from South India] and understand the customs and laws of the South Indians. Most of our thinking is conditioned by things we are used to. People in South India marry their maternal uncles' daughters. That is a very common thing, but the wonderful list of prohibited relationships prohibits such marriages….It is not abnormal and therefore I request my North Indian friends not to see things through their limited glasses only. Customs differ; habits differ….[110]

Bengali Brahmins eat fish; Punjabi women wear trousers – these are disgusting practices in South Indian eyes. "Similarly, the thinking of our North Indian friends is conditioned by things they are accustomed to".[111]

The struggle to prevent the outlawing of Dravidian marriage practices by the combined forces of North Indian prejudice, traditional Hindu orthodoxy and Enlightenment eugenic science was conducted over a decade or more. The upshot was a political compromise on behalf of a nation struggling for unity and stability in changing times. Few legislators actually defended Dravidian marriage practices, *except as* "custom", and only one Member in my recall (V.G. Deshpande) referred to shastric endorsement of cross-cousin marriage.[112] The ultimate solution was a political one, however. This was no time to drive a wedge between North and South India, whatever one's opinions on Hindu ethics, eugenics, or other people's "incestuous" unions. As Law Minister Pataskar put it, summing up the debate on "prohibited relationships" in the HMA:

> I know that amongst the people in the North the prohibited degrees vary from the prohibited degrees in the South. There are customs in the South even amongst the highest [castes], the Brahmins, … which permit marriages between certain persons which are not allowed in the North. *It is not desirable to enter into controversy whether one is right or wrong.* It has been a subject matter of controversy in the past and it will continue to be so for some time in future also.[113]

The answer is to lay down a definitive scheme of "prohibited relationships" – to show "how the wind blows and what is the trend of public opinion", but to allow people to follow their own customs if they so desired.

> … I would appeal to my hon. Friend … to think of the times in which there are already enough problems *and we should not add to it one of North or South.*

> Therefore, … – whatever our own ideas may be – it may be that what the hon. Member feels is more correct than what is followed by other people – it is much better to go along with the rest…. No one group of people living in the North or East can debate that one custom is bad. I think this should be better than exactitude in any way whatsoever.[114]

But what of the *gender* politics of "prohibited relationships"? Both marriage Bills were promoted as gestures towards women's equality;[115] both were critiqued, too, as likely to be injurious for women, particularly when it came to the liberalization of divorce. But these battles were fought for the most part over clauses on monogamy, divorce, age of marriage, maintenance and restitution of conjugal rights. The question of "prohibited relationships" was not construed as a "gender" issue affecting women's status in one way or the other. A stray and tantalizing exception was the report by a southern legislator, Vimla Devi, of unsuccessful attempts by women's organizations to campaign against consanguineous marriage.[116]

CASE LAW

The struggle for the legal recognition of Dravidian marriage practices in post-Independence India appeared to have been won by 1963 when the SMA was amended to allow breach of the "prohibited relationship" condition on grounds of "custom" and "usage". There remained a practical problem, however. "Custom" was not recognized *ipso facto*, but had to be *established* – either by government notification (SMA) or by due legal processes (HMA). Given the litigiousness of Indians in all walks of life, one would have expected vigorous exploitation of the vagaries of these clauses. As it is, legal textbooks confirm that almost *all* clauses of the Hindu personal law have attracted robust case law, and clauses that bear on the validity of marriage are part of the routine armory of those claiming or contesting succession to property, or seeking to avoid prosecution for bigamy or suits of maintenance.[117]

"Custom" is indeed amply contested in the context of, say, Section 7 of the HMA, which specifies the ceremonies required for a valid Hindu marriage. All *other* grounds for nullity – bigamy, want of consent, impotency, mental incompetence, age of marriage, etc. – are also exploited to the full.[118] *But*, the clauses on "prohibited relationships" have attracted hardly any case law worth looking at.[119] Much of the exemplary case law refers to judgments under Anglo-Hindu law, and though many of the latter do involve South Indian cases,[120] more recent case law is not especially focused on Dravidian kinship practices – our specific interest here – but deals with customary usage in other regions.[121]

I put this puzzle to a number of legal experts of my acquaintance. "But *everybody knows* that South Indians marry their cousins", said one, by way of explanation. The problem is that such a custom has to be legally *established* – whether by Gazette notification (SMA) or by appropriate evidence (HMA). Extrapolating from the ethnographic record, one can imagine cases where one form of cross-cousin marriage is customarily acceptable, the other not; or cross-cousin marriage is approved but uncle-niece marriage deplored; or a marriage may be correct in one reckoning, but improper in another. All such uncertainties should be grist to the lawyers' mill. On the other hand, a practicing lawyer construed the problem as a simple one of *locus standi*: It is unlikely that either party to a null marriage within the prohibited degrees would be motivated to file a nullity petition. But his answer disregards the plethora of nullity suits on *other* grounds, and the considerable utilization of nullity clauses by heirs and other interested parties in property disputes. The puzzle remains.

CONCLUSION

South India as a region has long been known for its singular rules of marriage which, along with other related practices, appear to have had the effect of moderating the sternly patrilineal emphasis of the rules and practices of Indo-Aryan kinship. These particularities have latterly become the focus of social science attention – not alone by kinship specialists, who seem to have reached a dead-end on the issue some time ago, but by demographers, development economists, and feminists, who have taken a keen interest in the southern region's superior track-record on questions of social development and gender equity. Yet, these same rules and practices were de-legitimized on grounds of morality and eugenic science by supposedly "progressive" post-Independence legislation. Ultimately, a lengthy process of political lobbying and negotiation, concluding in 1963 with the amendment to the "prohibited relationships" clause of the SMA, ensured their "saving" on grounds of "custom". It appears that the political class desired a "progressive" legal regime, but ultimately *not* at the cost of driving a wedge between the Hindus of North and South India.

To keep things in proportion, the struggle to ensure the (albeit qualified) recognition of Dravidian kinship practices was a relatively minor one in the overall context of marriage law reform: questions of monogamy, divorce, and the age of marriage were the salient points of controversy. Yet there *was*, obviously, an intense struggle going on both in public and behind the scenes, and it is rather surprising that there has been almost complete silence on the question ever since, whether in public debate or in academic discourse.[122] Nor has the legal profession seized the opportunity to exploit the vagaries of the concept of "custom". And it appears that there is no sense of grievance over the issue, even on the part of activists of the anti-Brahmin movements which have been a powerful force on the South Indian political scene for many decades.[123]

Is this because Dravidian marriage practices are now securely "saved" by the provision for reasonable customs and usages? Are South Indians excessively embarrassed by their usages in the face of the hegemonic ideology of Indo-Aryan kinship? Or do they just discreetly seek to avoid controversy, rather than draw further attention to South India's "incestuous" singularity?

Whatever the answer, it remains a matter of curiosity that the de-legitimization of Dravidian kinship has *not* been construed as a "gender" issue, though the distinctive marriage practices of the region appear to be at the core of the differentiation of North and South India, in kinship as in a range of social development indicators.

NOTES

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2. K.S. Singh (ed.), *An Anthropological Atlas of India. People of India, XI*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, and Anthropological Survey of India, 1993, pp. xi-xiii, 1–3.
3. Ibid., p. 52.
4. But also male primogeniture (129 cases) and male ultimogeniture (55).
5. Younger son (27); adopted son (117). Note that the map conflates rules of inheritance and succession.
6. K.S. Singh, *Anthropological Atlas*, p. 48.
7. Ibid., pp. 49, 53.
8. Perhaps one should specify more precisely that the reference is to the *Hindu* communities of India, Hinduism being the religion of approximately 80% of the population. The ethnographic coverage of Indian Muslim communities is relatively limited, though Leela Dube, for one, has brought Indian Muslim communities into the purview of her comparative study of gender and kinship in South *versus* Southeast Asia (see Leela Dube). On the Muslim family, see Imtiaz Ahmad (ed.) *Family, Kinship and Marriage in India.*
9. See e.g., A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, 'The Mother's Brother in South India', in A.R. Radcliffe-Brown (ed.), *Structure and Function in Primitive Society,* London: Cohen and West, 1952, p. 22.
10. Patricia Uberoi, *Family, Kinship and Marriage in India,* Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993, pp. 8–12.
11. Henry Sumner Maine, *Village Communities in the East and West*, London: John Murray, 1895, p. 15.
12. See Ronald Lardinois, 'Family and Household as Practical Groups: Preliminary Reflections on the Hindu Joint Family', in K. Saradamoni (ed.), *Finding the Household: Conceptual and Methodological Issues*, New Delhi: Sage, 1992, pp. 31–47.
13. Monica Das Gupta *et al.*, 'State Policies and Women's Autonomy in China, the Republic of Korea and India, 1950-2000: Lessons from Contrasting Experiences', Washington: the World Bank, Policy Research Report on Gender and Development, Working Paper No.16, 2000, pp. 3–4.
14. Ibid.; also Amartya Sen, 'Many Faces of Gender Inequality', *Frontier*, 9 Nov. 2001, pp. 4–14 (Based on Sen's inaugural lecture, Radcliffe Institution, Harvard University, 24 April, 2001).
15. See e.g., Bina Agarwal, 'The Family in Public Policy: Fallacious Assumptions and Gender Implications', Golden Jubilee Lecture No. 9, National Council of Applied Economic Research, New Delhi, 2000.
16. Ratna Kapur and Brenda Cossman, *Subversive Sites: Feminist Engagements with the Law in India*, New Delhi: Sage, 1996, p. 97.
17. Ibid., pp. 96–97.
18. See e.g., Leela Dube, *Women and Kinship,* esp. ch. 3.
19. See e.g., Kamla Bhasin, *What is Patriarchy?* New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1993.

20. Uma Chakravarti, 'Conceptualizing Brahmanical Patriarchy in Early India: Gender, Caste, Class and State', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 28:14, pp. 579–85, 1993.
21. F. Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977.
22. See Patricia Uberoi, 'Problems with Patriarchy: Conceptual Issues in Anthropology and Feminism', *Sociological Bulletin*, 44:2, 1995, pp. 195–221.
23. See, for instance, Leela Dube, *Matriliny and Islam*, New Delhi, National, 1969; Robin Jeffrey, *Politics, Women and Well-being: How Kerala became a Model*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1993; Janaki Nair, *Women and Law in Colonial India*, New Delhi, Kali for Women, 1991, pp. 150ff., Tiplut Nongbri, 'Gender and the Khasi Family Structure': in Patricia Uberoi (ed.), *Family, Kinship and Marriage in India;* K. Saradamoni, Matriliny Transformed: *Family, Law and Ideology in Twentieth Century Travancore*, New Delhi, Sage, 1999; Patricia Uberoi (ed.) *Social Reform, Sexuality and the State*, New Delhi, Sage Publications, 1996, to cite but a few examples.
24. K.S. Singh, *An Anthropological Atlas*, pp. 41, 42.
25. Parallel cousin marriage is relatively rare, again, except among Muslims. The *Atlas'* mapping of the incidence of parallel cousin marriage does not, unfortunately, distinguish between the matrilateral and patrilateral types (see K.S. Singh *Anthropological Atlas*, p. 44), a compelling distinction in view of the overall patrilineal bias through the subcontinent.
26. Ibid., p. 43.
27. Ibid., p. 77.
28. See Thomas Trautmann, 'The Study of Dravidian Kinship', in M.V. Deshpande and Peter Edwin Hook (eds.), *Aryan and Non-Aryan in India*, An Arbor: University of Michigan, 1979, p. 163, & Thomas Trautmann, *Dravidian Kinship*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, esp. ch 3.
29. T. Trautmann, *Dravidian Kinship*, pp. 216–28.
30. Lewis Henry Morgan, *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity of the Human Family*, Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1870; T. Trautmann, *Dravidian Kinship*, pp. 62–72, & T. Trautmann, *Lewis Henry Morgan and the Invention of Kinship*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987.
31. T. Trautmann, *Dravidian Kinship*, pp. 72–90.
32. See especially G.S. Ghurye, *Family and Kin in Indo-European Culture*, Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1955; K.M. Kapadia, *Marriage and Family in India*, Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1955; Irawati Karve, *Kinship Organization in India*, Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1965; Nandini Sundar, 'Irawati Karve' (forthcoming); Carol Upadhya, 'The Idea of Indian Society: G.S. Ghurye and the Making of Indian Sociology (forthcoming); also, importantly, Pandharinath H. Prabhu, *Hindu Social Organization: A Study in Socio-psychological and Ideological Foundations*, Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1995.
33. I. Karve, *Kinship Organization*; see the excerpt in P. Uberoi, *Famiy, Kinship*, 1993, pp. 50–73.
34. Irawati Karve, *Kinship Organization*, pp. 5, 8.

35. See Anthony T. Carter, 'A Comparative Analysis of Systems of Kinship and Marriage in South Asia', *Proceedings of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 1973, pp. 29–54; L. Dumont, 'Marriage in India, the Present State of the Question, III: North India in Relation to South India', *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 9, 1966, pp. 90–114; T. Trautmann, *Dravidian Kinship*, esp. Ch. 4; and essays in Akos Ostor, Lina Fruzzetti and Steve Barnett (eds), *Concepts of Person: Kinship, Caste and Marriage in India,* Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983.
36. Collected in Pauline Kolenda, *Regional Differences in Family Structure in India*, Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 1987, and dedicated, significantly, to the memory of Irawati Karve.
37. Kolenda's concept of "bargaining" is somewhat different from the interpretation recently given in the writings of feminist economists such as Bina Agarwal, *A Field of One's Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, ch. 2, though substantive features overlap.
38. P. Kolenda, *Regional Differences,* Chs. 1, 2 & 5.
39. For instance, the south has more female-favorable sex ratios, higher levels of women's education, and a greater proportion of women in salaried occupations (Ibid., ch. 5). See also S. Raju *et al.,* comp. *Atlas of Women and Men in India*, New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1999.
40. Tim Dyson and Mick Moore, 'On Kinship Structure, Female Autonomy and Demographic Behaviour in India, *Population and Development Review*, 9:1, 1983, p. 42 (emphasis added).
41. Bina Agarwal, *A Field*; Alaka Basu, *Culture, the Status of Women and Demographic Behaviour,* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992; S. Raju *et al., Atlas.*
42. See, for instance, P.N. Mari Bhat, 'Contours of Fertility Decline in India: A District Level Study Based on the 1991 Census', in K. Srinivasan (ed.), *Population Policy and Reproductive Health,* New Delhi: Hindustan, 1996, pp. 96-177. Working with better quality data than was available to Dyson and Moore, Mari Bhat, is able to distinguish seven distinct levels of fertility transition.
43. See among others Satish Agnihotri, *Sex Ratio Patterns in the Indian Population*, New Delhi: Sage, 2000; Barbara Miller, *The Endangered Sex: Neglect of Female Children in Rural India,* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981 & 'Changing Patterns of Juvenile Sex Ratios in Rural India, 1961-1971, *EPW*, 24:22, 1989, pp. 1229-36; L. Visaria, 'Deficit of Women in India: Magnitude, Trends, Regional Variations and Determinants', in Bharati Ray & Aparna Basu (eds.), *From Independence Towards Freedom* Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 80-89.
44. See Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen, *India: Economic Development and Social Opportunity*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996 & (eds.*), Indian Development: Selected Regional Perspectives*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996; Robin Jeffrey, *Politics, Women and Well-being.*
45. Amaryta Sen, 'Many faces', p. 12.
46. Ibid., emphasis added.
47. Described at length in, e.g., Archana Parashar, *Women and Family Law Reform in India: Uniform Civil Code and Gender Equality*, New Delhi: Sage, 1992. See also Bina Agarwal,

A Field, pp. 199–215; J.D.M. Derrett, *Religion, Law and the State in India*, London: Faber & Faber, 1968, ch. 10; Law Minister Pataskar's introduction to the Hindu Marriage Bill, *Lok Sabha Debates* (*LSD*) 26.iv.1955, cols. 6468–70.

48. Originally introduced to legalize Brahmo marriages. Members of the reformist Brahmo Samaj, founded in the nineteenth century, repudiated Hindu rituals. At the same time, the form of marriage that they instituted could not be condoned as "customary", for "custom" by definition must be long standing. See Shri Biswas *LSD* 26.iv.1954, cols. 7798–99. A similar problem arose in the case of Tamil non-Brahmin marriages (see W.F. Menski, *Modern Indian Family Law*, Richmond, UK: Curzon Press, 2001, pp. 13–15).
49. This was corrected for Hindus married under the Act by an Amendment in 1976 (Article 21A, SMA).
50. Shri Algu Rai Shastri, *LSD* 16. xii. 1953, col. 2319.
51. See Law Minister Biswas' introduction to the Special Marriage Bill, *LSD* 19.v.1954, cols. 7797-99; also Renu Chakravartty, *LSD* 16.xii.1953, col. 2317; *LSD* 7.ix.1954, cols. 1222-24; C.C. Shah *LSD* 19.v.1954, cols. 7831-32; C.R. Chowdary *LSD* 20.v.1954, cols. 7880-82; Jawaharlal Nehru *LSD* 14.ix.1954, cols. 1860-62. Article 44 of the Constitution states as a Directive Principle: "The State shall endeavour to secure for the citizens a uniform civil code through the territory of India".
52. Dr. Rama Rao, *LSD* 7.ix.1954, cols. 1214–16.
53. C.R. Chowdary, *LSD* 20.v.1954, cols. 7881–82.
54. Renu Chakravartty, *LSD*, 16.xii.1953, col. 2317. This point of view was also stated with eloquence by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, *LSD* 21.v.1954, cols. 8048–54.
55. D.C. Sharma, *LSD* 17.xii.1953, cols. 2370–71.
56. See J.D.M. Derrett, *Religion, Law*, ch. 10.
57. Pataskar, *LSD* 26.iv.1955, cols. 6468ff. It did not escape critics and cynics that divorce and remarriage were already allowed, often on more liberal grounds, by the customary law of an estimated 80% of the Hindu population; and that the Act's cautious allowance of divorce made this law at once "brahminizing" for the majority, and "liberalizing" for the upper caste minority.
58. Pataskar *LSD* 26.iv.1955, cols. 6475–6502.
59. D. Mulla, *Principles of Hindu Law*, New Delhi: Buttersworth, 1998, p. 41; Jaspal Singh, *Hindu Law of Marriage and Divorce*, Delhi: Pioneer Publishers, 1983, pp. 18–19, 41.
60. The Parliamentary debates we consider below also offer ample illustration of this point.
61. See J.D.M. Derrett, *Death of a Marriage Law: Epitaph for the Rishis*, New Delhi: Vikas.
62. Here I follow in particular the pioneering work of P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmasastra*, Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1930-62, especially Book II, Part 1 [1941], and Thomas Trautmann, *Dravidian Kinship*, ch. 4; also J.D.M. Derrett, *Religion, Law and Death*, Robert Lingat *The Classical Law of India*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973, P.H. Prabhu, *Hindu Social Organization: A Study in Socio-Psychological and Ideological Foundations*, Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1955, esp. 154ff., and others, including the standard compendia of Hindu law, such as G. Banerjee, *The Hindu Law of Marriage and Stridhan*, 4th edition, Delhi: Mittal, 1984, pp. 57ff., J.D. Mayne, *Treatise,*

and D. Mulla, *Hindu Law*, vol. 1, ch. 22, and more recently P. Diwan, *Modern Hindu Law*, chs. 3 & 7.

63. S.J. Tambiah, 'From Varna to Caste through Mixed Unions', in J. Goody (ed.), *The Character of Kinship*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973, pp. 191-229.
64. L. Dumont, 'The Debt to Ancestors and the Category of *Sapinda*', in C. Malamood (ed.), *Debt and Debtors,* New Delhi: Vikas, 1983, pp. 14–15; also, T.N. Madan, *Family and Kinship: A Study of the Pandits of Rural Kashmir,* 2nd edition, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989, pp. 91–92, 287.
65. P.V. Kane, *Dharmasastra,* II, 1, pp. 482ff; K.M. Kapadia, *Marriage and Family*, pp. 19–21.
66. See T. Trautmann, *Dravidian Kinship*, p. 239ff. It is an extension of this ideology of patrilineal descent that justifies the oft-reported rule of "village exogamy" in north Indian kinship practice. All co-villagers, even persons of different castes and descent groups, are treated as though they are descended from a common patrilineal ancestor. P. Hershman, *Punjabi Kinship and Marriage* Delhi: Hindustan, 1981, pp. 133-37; O. Lewis, *Village Life in Northern India,* New York: Vintage Books, 1958, pp. 160–61. Thus marriages and liaisons *within* the village are regarded as heinous and attract strong sanctions. See Prem Chowdhry, 'Enforcing Cultural Codes: Gender and Violence in Northern India', in Mary E. John & Janaki Nair (eds), *A Question of Silence? The Sexual Economies of Modern India,* New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1998, esp. pp. 339–42.
67. The fourth class, the Shudras, were not recognized to have *gotras,* and were allowed to be governed in matters of family life by their own customs. The Untouchables were considered to be beyond the pale of Hindu law.
68. See T. Trautmann, *Dravidian Kinship*, pp. 246ff.; also L. Dumont, 'Debt to Ancestors'.
69. A cognatic, *sapinda*-like concept is invoked in the so-called three- or four-*gotra* rule of marriage in north Indian kinship. This rule prohibits marriage with partners from the patrilineal descent groups, even the patronymics, of the father, the father's mother's father, the mother's father, and, possibly, the mother's mother's father.
70. T. Tautmann, *Dravidian Kinship*, pp. 302-40. For further discussion see J.D.M. Derrett, *Religion, Law,* pp. 86-87, 1978 refers to J.D.M. Derrett's second book, *Death of a Marriage Law,* now incorporated in p. 61; P.V. Kane, *Dharmasastra,* II, Pt. 1, pp. 458-67; K.M. Kapadia, *Marriage and Family,* pp. 117ff.; J.D. Mayne, *Hindu Law,* p. 134.
71. T. Trautmann, *Dravidian Kinship,* p. 281. Trautmann provides a useful translation of Madhava's comment on the authoritative text of the *Yajnavalkya Smrti* (1.52) that prohibits marriage with a *sapinda* (Ibid., pp. 438-46).
72. On the other hand, the Dravidian taboo on marriage with the matrilateral parallel cousin might be weakened by the same logic (cf. Kane, *Dharmasastra,* II, Pt.1, p. 469). See J.D.M. Derrett's critical comments on Madhava's rationalization of Dravidian marriage in *Religion, Law,* pp. 86–87, which creates a predicament for those castes which practise marriage in the *Asura* form (formerly, widely prevalent in South India).
73. The case for inter-caste marriages had already been won through The Hindu Marriage Disabilities Removal Act, 1946, and The Hindu Marriages Validity Act, 1949, which were repealed with the coming into force of the HMA (HMA, Section 30). Section 29 (1) of the HMA confirms the provisions of this earlier legislation: "A marriage

solemnized between Hindus before the commencement of this Act [1955], which is otherwise valid, shall not be deemed to be invalid, or ever to have been invalid by reason only of the fact that the parties thereto belonged to the same *gotra* or *pravara* or belonged to different religions, castes or subdivisions of the same caste." The term "religion" in this Section refers to those religions, sects and reformist groups which are defined as "Hindu" under Section 2(1) of the HMA: it includes Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs, but explicitly excludes Muslims, Christians, Parsis and Jews.

74. E.g. S.S. Iyengar, 'Hindu Law Reform', *Madras Law Journal,* 1941, p. 16; K.M. Kapadia, *Marriage and Family,* pp. 120–21.
75. "Custom" is here defined to mean "any rule which the State Government may, by notification in the Official Gazette, specify … as applicable to members of that tribe, community or family." It should be "continuously and uniformly observed for a long time", "not unreasonable or opposed to public policy", and, if a family usage, not "discontinued" (SMA Section 4, "Explanation").
76. Act 32 of 1963, Section 2 (c).
77. HMA Section 3 (g) (a) and (b).
78. See U.M. Trivedi, *LSD* 17.xii.1953, cols. 2411-12; S.S. More, *LSD* 1.ix.1954, cols. 810–11. Thundered More: "…. The First Schedule is not a good thing. When you concretize certain facts you are reduced to such a ridiculousness. …If this legislation is taken up by some foreigner, he would get an impression that in India people are out to marry their grandfather's mother and therefore, the sovereign Parliament was forced to say that you cannot marry that lady. By the time he is ready to marry, she will be in her grave already" (ibid.).
79. HMA 3 (g) (a) and (b).
80. HMA Section 3 (g) (c). This provision expressly disallows leviratic marriage, a common practice in many parts of India.
81. Pataskar, *LSD* 26.iv.1955, col. 6475. The cross-cousins (though *not* the brother's widow) were also prohibited as *sapindas.*
82. HMA Section 5 (v).
83. HMA Section 3 (f) (i) and (ii).
84. For a working out of *sapinda* relationships in the context of the HMA, see e.g. D. Mulla *Principles,* vol. 2, pp. 29–36. That practicing lawyers find little use for this provision of the Act (Section V (v)) is surely demonstrated by the garbled and frequently incorrect explanations of *sapinda*-ship provided in legal textbooks, including such recognized authorities as D. Mulla, *Principles,* and P. Diwan *Modern Hindu Law.*
85. See K.M. Kapadia, *Marriage and Family,* p. 121.
86. HMA Section 3 (a).
87. Originally made possible by Sir Hari Singh Gour's 1923 amendment to the SMA (1872). See Biswas' statement, *LSD* 19.v.1954, cols. 7802-04.
88. See for instance Shri Raghavachari, *LSD* 7.ix.1954, col. 1221; also Renu Chakravartty *LSD* 7.ix.1954, cols. 1223-24, among many others.
89. See Law Minister Biswas' statement, *LSD* 19.v.1954, cols. 7797-7811-12; also *LSD* 1.ix.1954, col. 836.

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90. SMA Clause 15.
91. Many Members demanded to know the source of the "demand" for amendment of the Act. The only person actually named in this regard was nationalist leader, Rajagopalachari. See Bibidhendra Mishra *LSD* 28.viii.1963, col. 3268.
92. The procedure for establishing "custom" was somewhat different, however. In the case of the amended SMA, custom was to be established by State Government notification, rather than through judicial procedure, as in the case of the HMA.
93. See B.C.Das *LSD* 8.ix.1954, col. 1256.
94. Ibid., cols. 1229-30.
95. Pandit Thakur Das Bhargava, *LSD* 3.05.1955, col. 7458.
96. Ibid., cols. 7458-59, emphasis added.
97. N.C. Chatterjee *LSD* 17.xii.1953, cols. 2384-85.
98. Ibid., cols. 2386-87.
99. Mulchand Dube, 2.ix.1954, cols. 850-51, emphasis added. See also Dube's proposed amendment to the SMA First Schedule, 16.ix.1954, cols. 2159-60. Dube was of the opinion that exogamous prohibitions should extend to second cousins at least.
100. U.M. Trivedi, *LSD* 28.viii.1963, col. 3234, emphasis added.
101. Shri Dhabhi *LSD* 8.ix.1954, col. 1257.
102. Tek Chand *LSD* 13.ix.1954, col. 1754.
103. Presumably he was replying to a point made by Dr. Rama Rao (see below) that there was no adequate scientific evidence to support the idea of the ill-effects of consanguineous marriage.
104. Dr. Jaisoorya *LSD* 7.ix.1954, col. 1226. Among many other references to eugenics, see e.g. Shri Biswas, *LSD* 19.v.1954, col. 78111; C.C. Shah, *LSD* 19.v.1954, cols. 7835-36. Eugenics is the rationalization that many South Indians give nowadays for their discontinuance of consanguineous marriages. Some South Indians have also sought to distinguish the relatively innocuous cross-cousin marriage from the more exotic practice of uncle-niece marriage, on both eugenic and moral grounds. See S.S. Iyengar, 'Hindu Law' p. 17.
105. U.M. Trivedi, *LSD* 17.xii.1953, col. 2413. See Trivedi's similar comment almost a decade later, *LSD* 28.viii.1963, col. 3235.
106. Vimla Devi, *LSD* 28.viii.1963, cols. 3230-34.
107. Ibid., col. 3232.
108. R. Venkataraman, *LSD*, 3.v.1955, cols. 7542-43; Shri Velayudhan *LSD* 7.ix.1954, cols. 1235-36. Punjab Legislator Sardar Hukam Singh, however, was convinced that consanguine marriages would increase if women were given property rights under the HSA: Either that, or one would see female infanticide on a large scale (*LSD* 3.v.1955, col. 7485).
109. Dr. Rama Rao, *LSD* 7.ix.1954, col. 1214.
110. Ibid., *LSD* 7.ix.1954, col. 1214.
111. Ibid., cols. 1214-16.
112. V.G. Deshpande, *LSD* 7.ix.1954, cols. 1227-30. Said Deshpande, who claimed to belong to a caste that practiced cross-cousin marriages: "I would accept challenge from

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anybody to prove that they are against *shastras*, or against any laws of eugenics. If you read the old *nibandas* and *prabhandas*, there are very scholarly discussions on this point" (Ibid., col. 1227). Deshpande objected only to smuggling recognition of these practices into the SMA under the provision for "custom".

113. Shri Pataskar, *LSD* 3.v.1955, cols. 7567-68, emphasis added.
114. Ibid., col. 7568; see similarly Bibudhendra Mishra, *LSD* 28.viii.1963, cols. 3266-70. Though it might be assumed that the "unity" of India meant the unity of *Hindu* Indians, at least one Member argued for tolerance of Muslim (cross- and parallel-) cousin marriage, abominable as it might seem to Hindu sentiment: After all, Muslims too had "contributed to the progress of our country and of the world" (K.K. Basu, *LSD* 14.ix.1954, col. 1850).
115. See e.g. Renu Chakravartty, *LSD* 16.xii.1953, cols. 2317-18; *LSD* 14.ix.1954, cols. 1823-32; *LSD* 2.v.1955, cols. 7254-62; Shri Pataskar 26.iv.1955, col. 6500; S.S. More, 2.v.1955, cols. 7392-95.
116. Vimla Devi, *LSD* 28.viii.1963, col. 3232.
117. See W. Menski, *Family Law*, pp. 35–43, and ch. 4.
118. cf. Patricia Uberoi, 'When is a Marrriage not a Marriage? Sex, Sacrament and Contract in Hindu Marriage', in Patricia Uberoi (ed.*), Social Reform, Sexuality and the State*, New Delhi: Sage Publications, pp. 319–45.
119. An observation confirmed by search of the Supreme Court Cases.
120. See Balusami Reddiar *v.* Balakrishna Reddiar, AIR 1957 Mad. 97, regarding the pre-Act marriage of a man with his granddaughter (DD). Though possibly allowable by "custom" in the community concerned, the custom was deemed "revolting to all principles of morality, decency and eugenics" (p. 98): "No custom which is opposed to public policy can be recognized by a Court of law. Nor can immoral usages, however much practiced, be countenanced" (p. 99, para. 9).
121. For instance, Punjab, where Hindu law was not earlier in force. See e.g. Shakuntala Devi *v.* Amar Nath, AIR 1982 P & H, 221.
122. Apart from a few stray remarks by the inimitable J.D.M. Derrett, issues relating to the exogamic provisions of the marriage laws find no mention in secondary writings on Indian family law. W.F. Menski, *Indian Family Law*, and A. Parashar, *Women and Family Law*, are cases in point.
123. M.S.S. Pandian, personal communication.

CHAPTER 3

Reviewing Muslim Women and Marriage: A Preliminary Analysis of Survey Finding

Zoya Hasan and Ritu Menon

Few issues have attracted greater interest among academicians and activists in India than those that concern women and Islam, but much of this interest is caught up in misconceptions that usually leave Muslim women invisible. Their experiences are commonly viewed as synonymous with Muslim men or women generally, thus reifying the categories of gender and community; their invisibility compounded by the fact that when they do become visible in their own right then religion becomes the primary force that can be invoked to understand every aspect of their lives, ranging from family structure, poverty, marriage, divorce, unemployment to education, and so on. However, this invisibility is not a recent phenomenon for, as Gail Minault remarks, historically, the imperial discourse ignored Muslim women because purdah removed 'women from scrutiny both literally as well as figuratively'.[1]

In the post-colonial period at least two misunderstandings have dominated academic discussions and debates on Muslim women. First, it is commonplace to see Muslims and Muslim women as a monolithic category; writings on Muslims in general, and Muslim women in particular, make broad generalizations about what is, actually a highly differentiated and heterogeneous community. Such a reductive thesis is based on a complete misapprehension of Muslim history, culture, and politics, and totally misses or denies the rich and diverse traditions that make up Muslims and Muslim discourses. Nasreen Fazalbhoy writes that this is because the analysis of Muslims has been concentrated on a few areas, and has also been largely defined by attitudes prevalent in the larger social milieu.[2] With a few notable exceptions the spotlight has remained on the role of religion in Muslim life and culture, largely producing sociologies of religion rather than a sociology of Muslims.

Contributions to the four volumes edited by Imtiaz Ahmad some years ago highlighted the bewildering diversity of Muslim communities, and argued that the living reality made it impossible to speak of Islam in the singular given the divergences of observances, sects, and schisms, and *de facto* differences in attitude.[3] They brought to light the rich diversity in family, kinship, and marriage among Muslims and, importantly, that every region had its own context often shaped and ordered by regional society, culture, and political movements. Hence in regions that have had a history of progressive social reform and development the status of Muslims is better than those that have had no such experience. Kerala, for instance, made an early start in eradicating social inequalities, leading to wide-ranging social development that has benefited all communities. At the other end of the spectrum, the socially and educationally backward states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar have made little progress in doing away with the traditional inequalities of caste, community, and gender, and therefore, whatever development has taken place has principally benefited the upper castes and classes. The differences between Kerala and Uttar Pradesh are instructive of the wider significance of understanding the varied profile of Muslim communities and the diverse experiences of being a Muslim woman in India.

The second misinterpretation stems from the weight given to Muslim personal law in defining women's status, resulting in a disproportionate emphasis on it, and a great deal of heated discussion about the gender bias of personal law and the appeasement of Muslims.[4] One has only to mention Muslim women to meet with an instant reaction, stereotyping them in relation to Muslim personal law. Many studies have fixed on Islam and personal law as either oppressor[5] or saviour, and most of them attribute women's low status to ignorance, traditional beliefs, and the inequities of personal laws.[6] They presume religion to be the defining factor of the Muslim condition, perpetuating practices such as the male privilege of unilateral divorce, high fertility, the ubiquitous veil, and strict conformity to a fundamentalist religious code. Moreover, just as the focus in these studies and debates is not on women per se, but on Shariat and legal codes that are biased *against* women, so too, the appeasement is of religious leaders rather than of women. In any event, Islamic practice does not and cannot constitute the whole of women's lives.

A more deliberate engagement with the secular discourse of development and empowerment, it seems to us, might be one way out of the current impasse. It would allow us, first, to address the 'structural forms of marginalization that have gone into the making of the "Muslim", as Mary John says,[7] as well as to examine the embeddedness of institutionalized inequalities in Indian society and the structures of domination that perpetuate social injustice. It would also enable us to better understand Muslim women by locating them within the broader context of economic, political, and other interests, and appreciate that disadvantage, discrimination, and disempowerment are experienced at specific and particular intersections of class, caste, gender, and community.

To this end, we undertook a major, nationwide survey of Muslim women, in 2000–2001, to generate a national profile of Muslim women in all their heterogeneity. This survey was carried out in 12 states, spread over 40 districts in the country. This is the first comprehensive baseline survey of Muslim women in India, indeed of women anywhere, covering a wide range of issues, and is a blend of quantitative and qualitative indices, focuses on several aspects of Muslim women's lives: socio-economic status, work, education, marriage, mobility, media access, political participation, decision-making, and domestic violence with 9541 Muslim and Hindu women respondents – 80 per cent Muslim and 20 per cent Hindu. The design of the Muslim Women's Survey (MWS), the identification of districts and selection of the sample followed logically from our reconceptualization of the issue; i.e., avoiding essentialism and moving beyond religious community in order to situate women in a socio-economic, regional, and political context; and equally, to avoid the polarization of the public and private by which most investigations (particularly those that rely on survey data) either focus on the more public, hence quantifiable, variables, or selectively assess only particular dimensions of the private. A full picture thus eludes both.

A word about the several connected and often overlapping elements of our survey, and the questions and concerns that undergird the areas it explores. The most basic of these is to present primary data on Muslim women's socio-economic status, and conventional status indicators like literacy, education, marital status, and work. Following on from this, however, are the several questions that bedevil us about women's persistent low status and the reasons for it. Material considerations apart, such as poverty, poor education, ill-health, economic dependency and gender discrimination, should we be looking at other factors that correlate with these objective ones; factors that might help explain the existential reality of Muslim women's lives? For instance: are increasing literacy rates a sufficient index of women's improved educational status, or is the educational level attained a more accurate assessment? If so, what sorts of constraints operate or impede their attaining these higher levels? Are these constraints economic, social, or cultural? Do they have to do with class, community, or region? How far are they gendered? Does early marriage, for instance, have a bearing on the high incidence of dropping out among Muslim girls, or can it be accounted for by factors like availability of sex-segregated neighbourhood schools, financial pressures, number of siblings, medium of instruction?

Similarly, is early marriage a consequence of conservatism within the Muslim community or a result of socio-cultural factors that make for sharp differences between regions, irrespective of religious community? Is it a function of poverty or of the general devaluation of women, Hindu or Muslim? Conversely does late marriage, or even, marriage after the legal age, make a significant difference to women's educational or work status? Alternatively, as we hope to elaborate, are mobility and autonomy more important than either education or marital status as far as women's work status and economic independence are concerned? Does the attainment of school education, better health, employment, and a measure of economic self-sufficiency necessarily pave the way for empowerment? What place would any consideration of empowerment accord to the severe curtailment of women's mobility, and to pervasive and wide-ranging domestic violence? We hope to demonstrate that it is only by evaluating objective indices like literacy, education, work, together with marital status, motherhood, the more elusive factors like decision-making, control over income, mobility, violence, and how they intersect with class, community, religion, and region, that we can arrive at a more informed understanding both of women's actual status and the extent to which empowerment has been achieved.

For the purpose of this essay, let us examine what the Survey findings tell us about marriage, not sociologically or anthropologically in the sense of dealing with family or kinship, but as a lived reality. Marriage in India is near-universal. The MWS reports that the overwhelming majority (85–90 per cent) of women across all social groups are currently married, with the next biggest categories being widowed and never-married; all-India, these are the three most significant categories.

Questions to our respondents dealt with the following: current marital status; number of marriages; age at first marriage; age at which first marriage was dissolved, if divorced, last age at marriage; their opinion on the ideal age at marriage for boys and girls, and their reasons for their preference; whether aware of the legal minimum age at marriage for boys and girls; whether these legal norms are followed in their community, and if not why. Finally, respondents were asked whether they had noted an increase in the age at marriage for girls in their community in the recent past.

Table 1
Current Marital Status by Community

All-India groups	Current Marital Status								Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	9	
SC	90.29	0.06	4.70	0.00	0.25	0.00	4.69	0.00	100.00
ST	85.50	0.00	8.61	0.00	0.00	0.36	5.52	0.00	100.00
OBC	88.35	0.45	6.35	0.29	0.04	0.00	4.52	0.00	100.00
Others	83.87	0.22	8.45	0.41	0.41	0.15	6.48	0.00	100.00
Muslim	85.94	0.33	6.70	0.47	0.43	0.34	5.77	0.02	100.00
Total	87.64	0.25	6.41	0.23	0.22	0.09	5.15	0.00	100.00

1: Currently married, 2: married but gauna not performed, 3: widowed, 4: divorced, 5: separated, 6: deserted, 7: never married, 9: no response.

Age at Marriage

The MWS shows that 88 per cent of Indian women are currently married, with slightly more Muslim women, 86 per cent, than upper caste Hindus 84 per cent, in this category. It further shows that 60 per cent Muslim and 55 per cent Hindu women are married by

Table 2
Mean Age at First Marriage: All-India

Religion-caste groups	Summary of age at first marriage	
	Mean	Observations
SC	15.310 924	618
ST	15.588 803	93
OBC	15.778 727	829
Others	15.863 325	553
Muslim	15.546 636	7192
Total	15.612 098	9285

the age of 17,[8] and that women with low educational levels – illiterate or up to primary – across region and religion, are more likely to be married below the legal age than women with medium or high levels of education.

The Survey reports that the all-India mean age at first marriage is 15.6 years, i.e., almost a whole year lower than the NFHS. Our data also indicate that age at first marriage fluctuates between 14 and 18 years, but reveals some interesting urban, rural, and regional differences. The mean age at marriage for upper caste Hindu women across rural India is *lower* than that for Muslim women, except in the rural East, where it is 15.1 years for Muslims and 16.9 or 17 for Hindus. The figure is the lowest for rural North: 13.9 years followed by rural West: 14.2 years, and South: 14.3 years, for Hindus.

Table 3
Mean Age at First Marriage: Rural North

Religion-caste groups	Summary of age at first marriage	
	Mean	Observations
1	14.771 144	201
2	14.888 889	9
3	14.968 586	191
4	13.931 034	58
5	15.324 022	895
Total	14.811 494	1354

Table 4
Rural South

Religion-caste groups	Summary of age at first marriage	
	Mean	Observations
1	17.343 75	32
3	16.315 068	73
4	14.352 0	
5	16.005 254	571
Total	16.240 904	696

Table 5
Rural West

Religion-caste groups	Summary of age at first marriage	
	Mean	Observations
1	15.909 091	22
2	14.437 5	16
3	18.468 75	32
4	14.25	16
5	16.290 557	413
Total	16.279 668	499

Table 6
Rural East

Religion-caste groups	Summary of age at first marriage	
	Mean	Observations
1	16.084 507	71
2	16.048 78	41
3	16.954 545	22
4	16.938 462	65
5	15.119 097	974
Total	16.159 836	1173

Table 7
Mean Age at First Marriage: Urban South

Religion-caste groups	Summary of age at first marriage	
	Mean	Observations
1	16.080 645	62
2	18.142 857	7
3	16.294 964	139
4	18.187 5	32
5	16.510 417	1152
Total	16.538 785	1392

The picture for urban India is only marginally better, and it is better especially for Hindu women, who report a mean age at marriage of 17 years except, surprisingly, in the

West, where the age drops to 15.9 years, marginally lower than the Muslim figure of 16.0 years. Urban and rural East report the lowest figures for Muslim women, at 15.1 and 14.7 years respectively. So, rural North for Hindu women and urban East for Muslims are the outliers.

Table 8
Mean Age at First Marriage: Urban East

Religion-caste groups	Summary of age at first marriage	
	Mean	Observations
1	15.046 875	64
2	17.166 667	6
3	15.95	40
4	17.316 832	101
5	14.731 849	1033
Total	16.143 738	1244

Table 9
Current Marital Status: Urban North

Religion-caste groups	Current marital status								Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	9	
1	90.16	0.00	7.38	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.46	0.00	100.00
2	100.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	100.00
3	87.12	0.38	6.82	0.00	0.00	0.00	5.68	0.00	100.00
4	89.47	1.05	4.21	0.00	0.00	1.05	4.21	0.00	100.00
5	82.41	0.33	5.73	0.50	0.83	0.00	10.04	0.17	100.00
Total	87.96	0.49	5.97	0.06	0.10	0.30	5.10	0.02	100.00

1 = Currently married. 2 = married but gauna not performed.
3 = widowed. 4 = divorced. 5 = separated. 6 = deserted.
7 = never married. 9 = no response.

Figures for never-married Hindu women in rural North and rural South are: 6.9 per cent and 25 per cent respectively – that is, *one-fourth of caste Hindu women in rural South have never married.* Corresponding figures for Muslim women are: never married, rural North: 5.8 per cent, rural south: 5.6 per cent. Muslim women widowed, rural north: 5.48 per cent; rural south: 9.1 per cent. The exceptional figure here is for Muslim widows in rural south, 9.1 per cent, higher even than the poorer rural east, where it is 6.9 per cent; *urban* east however, *reports the highest percentage for Muslim widows: 9.6 per cent.* The MWS is not able to offer an explanation for this finding, but large age differences between spouses may be a factor.

Other exceptional findings are: a very high percentage of *both* widowed and never-married, i.e., single-caste Hindu women in rural north and south, the former being as high as 20 per cent in the south and 13.7 per cent in the north.

Table 10
Current Marital Status: Urban South

Religion-caste groups	Current Marital Status							Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
1	80.65	1.61	3.23	0.00	0.00	0.00	14.52	100.00
2	85.71	0.00	14.29	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	100.00
3	75.54	2.16	9.35	0.72	0.00	0.00	12.23	100.00
4	84.38	0.00	9.38	0.00	0.00	0.00	6.25	100.00
5	83.68	0.87	8.42	0.35	1.04	0.17	5.47	100.00
Total	79.40	1.51	8.02	0.40	0.21	0.03	10.43	100.00

1 = Currently married. 2 = married but gauna not performed.
3 = widowed. 4 = divorced. 5 = separated. 6 = deserted.
7 = never married.

Table 11
Current Marital Status: Urban East

Religion-caste groups	Current Marital Status							Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
1	79.69	0.00	9.38	0.00	0.00	0.00	10.94	100.00
2	100.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	100.00
3	87.50	0.00	2.50	0.00	2.50	0.00	7.50	100.00
4	86.14	0.99	7.92	0.00	0.00	0.00	4.95	100.00
5	80.45	0.00	9.68	0.39	0.29	0.68	8.52	100.00
Total	84.24	0.41	7.46	0.05	0.45	0.09	7.30	100.00

Table 12
Current Marital Status: Urban West

Religion-caste groups	Current Marital Status								Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	9	
1	72.73	0.00	0.09	0.00	0.00	0.00	18.18	0.00	100.00
2	85.71	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	14.29	0.00	0.00	100.00
3	85.29	0.00	2.94	0.00	0.00	0.00	11.76	0.00	100.00
4	84.51	0.00	7.04	0.00	0.00	0.00	8.45	0.00	100.00
5	81.14	0.84	6.43	1.48	0.63	0.32	9.06	0.11	100.00
Total	81.92	0.16	5.91	0.28	0.12	0.49	11.10	0.02	100.00

Rural south has some other surprises for caste Hindu women, who simultaneously report a significantly lower number of currently married women – 55 per cent; and a correspondingly *high* number of those who are widowed – 20 per cent, and never-married – 25 per cent. This is so unusual in the all-India context that it needs some explanation through further probing or analysis. Rural west, by sharp contrast, reports no incidence of widowhood among caste-Hindus, unlike urban West, where the percentage is higher than that for Muslim women – 7.04 as against 6.43 per cent.

North India has generally been seen as backward, socially and economically, yet urban north reports the highest percentage of never-married Muslim women, 10.04, higher than the all-India proportion; there seems to be a departure here from the general pattern of early marriage as a consequence of poverty and conservatism. Urban south, meanwhile, reports the highest percentage of never-married scheduled and other backward castes, followed by a significant proportion of the same in urban east.

Muslim women, the next comparable group in terms of SES in the urban east, are fairly close as far as both widowhood and never-married status are concerned at 9.68 and 8.52 per cent, respectively.

An analysis by economic status shows that the overwhelming majority of women from all socio-economic classes are currently married, indicating that gender and customary practice, rather than class, are the determining factors as far as women's marital status is concerned. What is noteworthy, however, is that the percentage of women who never marry rises steadily in direct proportion to a higher socio-economic status. This may be a consequence of a combination of factors: higher educational status and job opportunities; a measure of economic security; even, perhaps, over-qualification vis-à-vis prospective grooms, an important consideration especially for Muslim girls. The incidence of widowhood, however, is largely unaffected by economic factors, with the proportion of widows among the poorest sections being almost the same as the richest, except for urban west which reports a very high percentage of widows among scheduled castes and tribes, and the incidence of desertion which is markedly higher than for all other classes of communities. Here again, gender seems to be the critical factor.

Table 13
Current Marital Status by SES

Religion-caste groups	Current Marital Status								Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	9	
1	92.26	0.16	4.78	0.52	0.76	0.17	1.35	0.00	100.00
2	89.23	0.18	6.62	0.02	0.16	0.21	3.57	0.00	100.00
3	83.55	0.17	7.95	0.58	0.39	0.10	7.20	0.05	100.00
4	88.01	0.52	6.85	0.23	0.06	0.00	4.33	0.00	100.00
5	85.34	0.33	4.92	0.06	0.04	0.02	9.28	0.00	100.00
Total	87.39	0.27	6.36	0.32	0.30	0.10	5.25	0.02	100.00

1 = Currently married. 2 = married but gauna not performed. 3 = widowed.
4 = divorced. 5 = separated. 6 = deserted. 7 = never married. 9 = no response.

The significant regional variation as far as Muslim women are concerned is rural south, which reports the highest percentage of those never-married: 20.36, accounted for, perhaps, by a higher incidence of male out-migration to the Gulf countries or a better educational status.

Divorce and Remarriage

Not only are the majority of Indian women currently married, they are also married only once. At an all-India level, the MWS indicates that only a very small percentage, 2.85, of the poorest women report a second marriage, with rural north and south reporting the highest percentage – 4.26 and 4.69 per cent, respectively.

Table 14
Number of times married by SES: All-India

Five fold classification of SLI	No. of times married				Total
	1	2	3	9	
1	96.20	2.85	0.02	0.93	100.00
2	97.75	0.35	0.01	1.88	100.00
3	98.04	0.85	0.02	1.09	100.00
4	99.44	0.24	0.10	0.22	100.00
5	99.14	0.24	0.00	0.61	100.00
Total	98.10	0.95	0.03	0.92	100.00

Table 15
Rural North

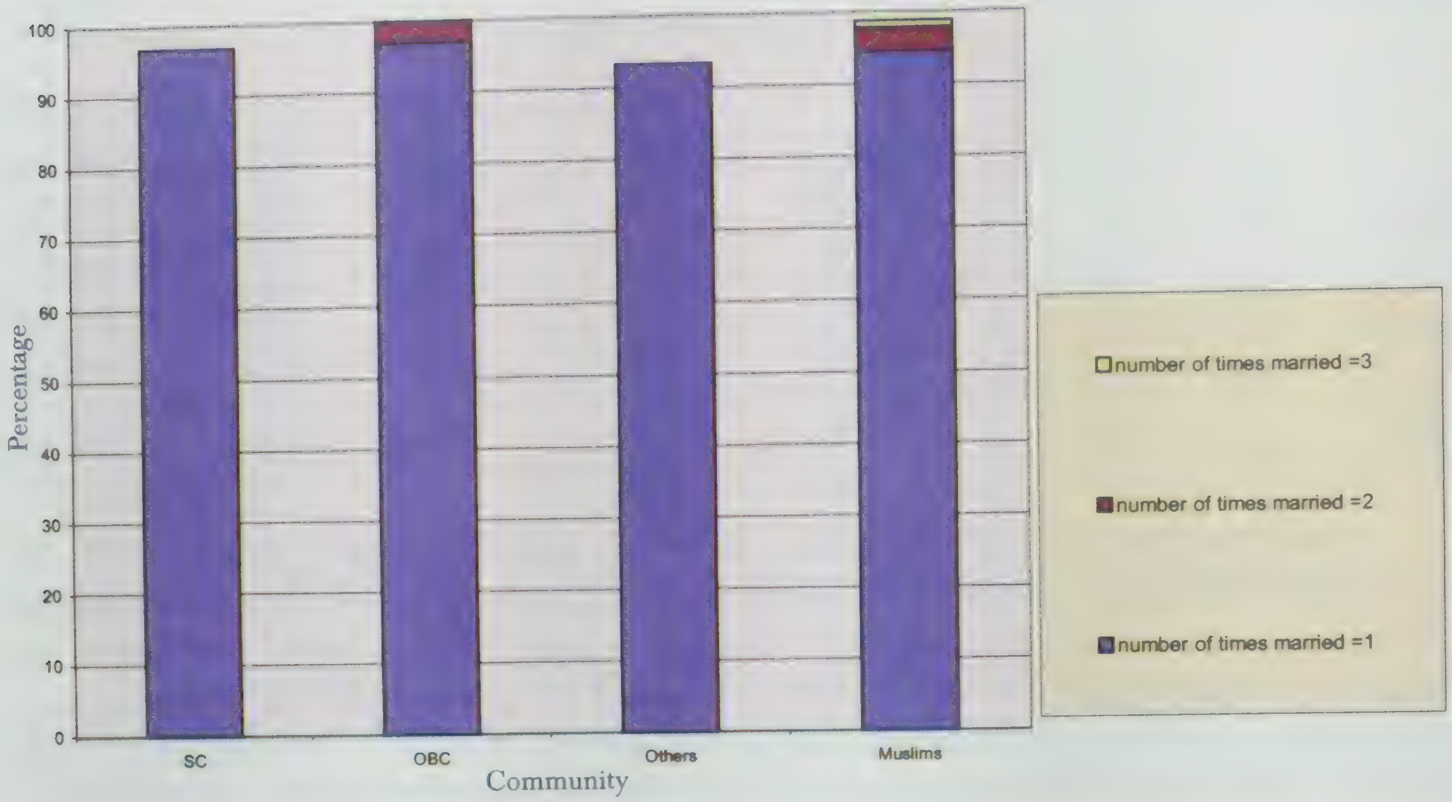
Five fold classification of SLI	No. of times married				Total
	1	2	3	9	
1	95.66	4.26	0.04	0.04	100.00
2	97.38	0.28	0.00	2.34	100.00
3	97.84	0.39	0.00	1.77	100.00
4	99.92	0.08	0.00	0.00	100.00
5	100.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	100.00
Total	97.80	1.34	0.01	0.85	100.00

Given that the incidence of divorce, desertion, and separation is also very low, this may not be an altogether unexpected finding; we should note, however, that this is contrary to the general assumption that Muslim women are commonly divorced or deserted on account of polygamy and unilateral divorce. (Indeed, a survey of 15,000 Muslim women carried out by the Women's Research and Action Group (WRAG) in 46 districts of India in 1993-95, reported that a total of only five per cent of the total sample had been either divorced, separated or remarried.[9]) It is, however, possible that women may not admit to or report being divorced because of the social stigma attached to it. In the MWS, although Muslim women reported the highest incidence of remarriage at two per cent, the figure is too small to be significant. Here again, rural south is noteworthy for having the highest proportion of second marriages – 3.40 per cent among Muslim women – accounted for, perhaps, by the high incidence of widowhood noted earlier. Urban east, which also reported a high percentage of widows – almost 10 per cent – indicates the highest number of second marriages for Muslim women. Notwithstanding this finding, the proportions are small.

Table 16
Rural South

Five fold classification of SLI	No. of times married				Total
	1	2	3	9	
1	95.31	4.69	0.00	0.00	100.00
2	99.65	0.24	0.12	0.00	100.00
3	94.39	2.72	0.11	2.78	100.00
4	99.58	0.28	0.07	0.07	100.00
5	94.88	0.11	0.00	5.01	100.00
Total	96.53	1.79	0.06	1.61	100.00

Chart 1
Number of times Married by Community: Rural South



All-India figures for divorce are even more startling: 0.41 per cent for Hindu women and 0.47 for Muslims. Again, contrary to the prevailing impressions the exception to this figure is the rural east, where divorced *Hindu* women report a high 1.54 per cent; a corresponding high rate for Muslim women is found in urban west, at 1.48 per cent. We might assume that this low figure for divorce conceals high rates of desertion and separation, but this is not borne out by our data – all-India, percentages for both are 0.09 and 0.22, respectively.

Table 17
Current Marital Status: Rural East

Religion-caste groups	Current Marital Status							Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
1	91.55	0.00	4.23	0.00	1.41	0.00	2.82	100.00
2	80.49	0.00	12.20	0.00	0.00	0.00	7.32	100.00
3	86.36	0.00	9.09	0.00	0.00	0.00	4.55	100.00
4	90.77	0.00	4.62	1.54	1.54	0.00	1.54	100.00
5	87.89	0.31	6.98	0.10	0.31	0.62	3.80	100.00
Total	88.32	0.07	6.63	0.41	0.85	0.14	3.58	100.00

Table 18
Urban West

Religion-caste group	Current Marital Status 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	9	Total
1	72.73	0.00	9.09	0.00	0.00	0.00	18.18	0.00	100.00
2	85.71	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	14.29	0.00	0.00	100.00
3	85.29	0.00	2.94	0.00	0.00	0.00	11.76	0.00	100.00
4	84.51	0.00	7.04	0.00	0.00	0.00	8.45	0.00	100.00
5	81.14	0.84	6.43	1.48	0.63	0.32	9.06	0.11	100.00
Total	81.92	0.16	5.91	0.28	0.12	0.49	11.10	0.02	100.00

Ideal Age at Marriage

Notwithstanding the fact that early marriage is the norm for women across class and community, our question on what, in the respondents' view, is the ideal age at marriage for boys and girls elicited some interesting responses. By far the largest percentage of Hindu and Muslim women – 26.32 and 33.70 respectively – thought that 25 years was the ideal age for boys; and 31.42 per cent of Hindu and 35.31 per cent of Muslim women thought 18 years was ideal for girls.

Community differences are insignificant; but what is significant is that the majority of women, over 70 per cent, believe that the *ideal* age for girls corresponds to the *legal minimum* age or above. In other words, the *desire* for later marriage manifests itself attitudinally, but not in actual practice because, as we have seen, the overwhelming majority of women are married before they reach the legal minimum age.

The landmark years, thus, are 18, 20/21, 25, and 30; but attitudinal differences based on gender become apparent when we compare the tables for girls and boys. The proportion favouring marriage in the pubertal years – between 12 and 18 – for girls is higher than that for boys:

Muslims: 18 per cent for girls
Hindus: 21 per cent for girls
Muslims: 1.34 per cent for boys
Hindus: 2.14 per cent for boys

Later or delayed marriage for girls (which in the MWS is after 20) is favoured by only 10 per cent of Muslim respondents and 14 per cent of Hindus; for boys (after 25 in our break-up) 17 per cent, Muslim and Hindu. Both figures are not very significant, nor are community differences; it is worth noting, though, that across the country *the occurrence of later or delayed marriage increases with higher standards of living.*

Chart 2
Ideal Age at Marriage for Boys

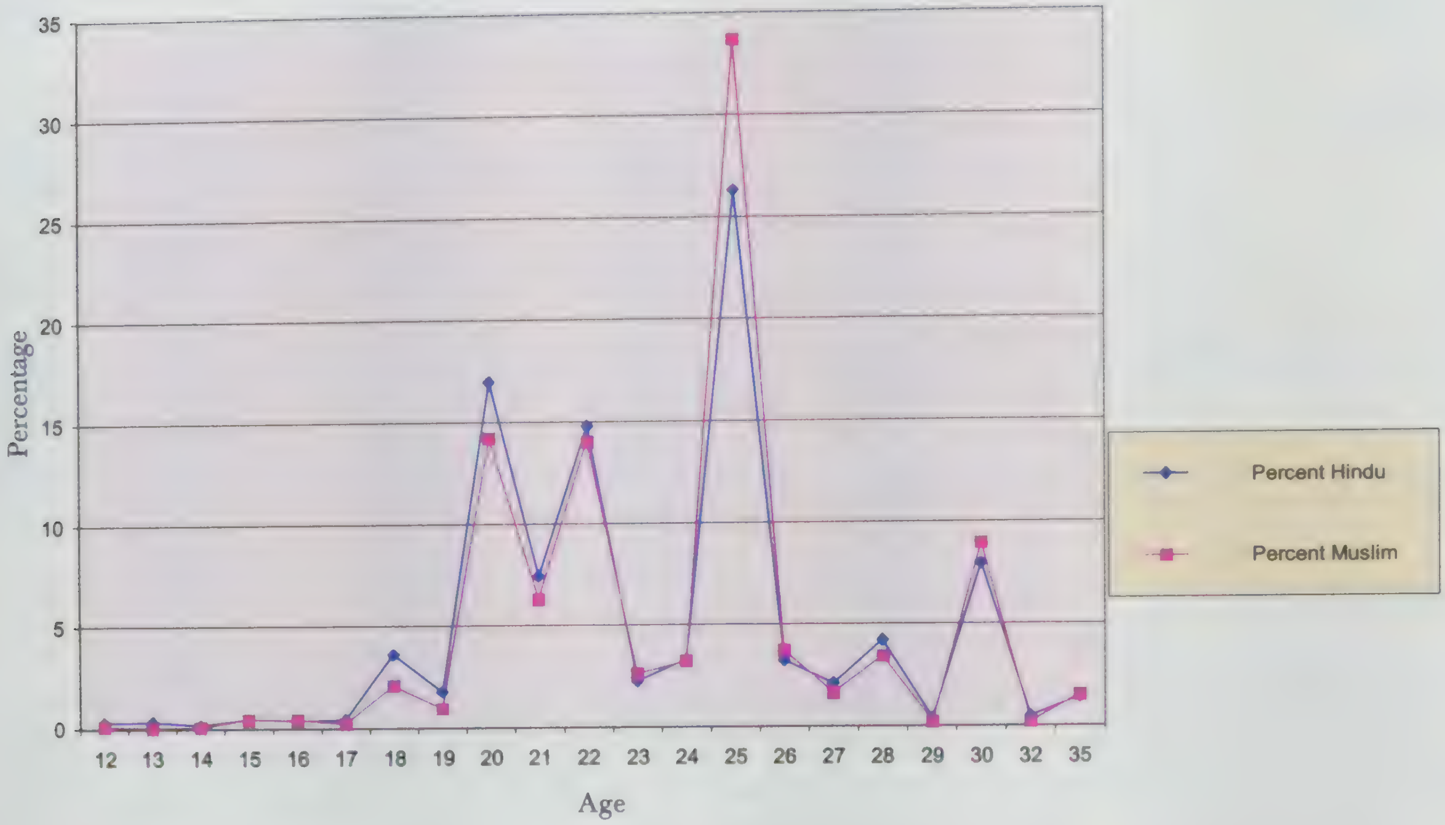


Chart 3
Ideal Age at Marriage for Girls

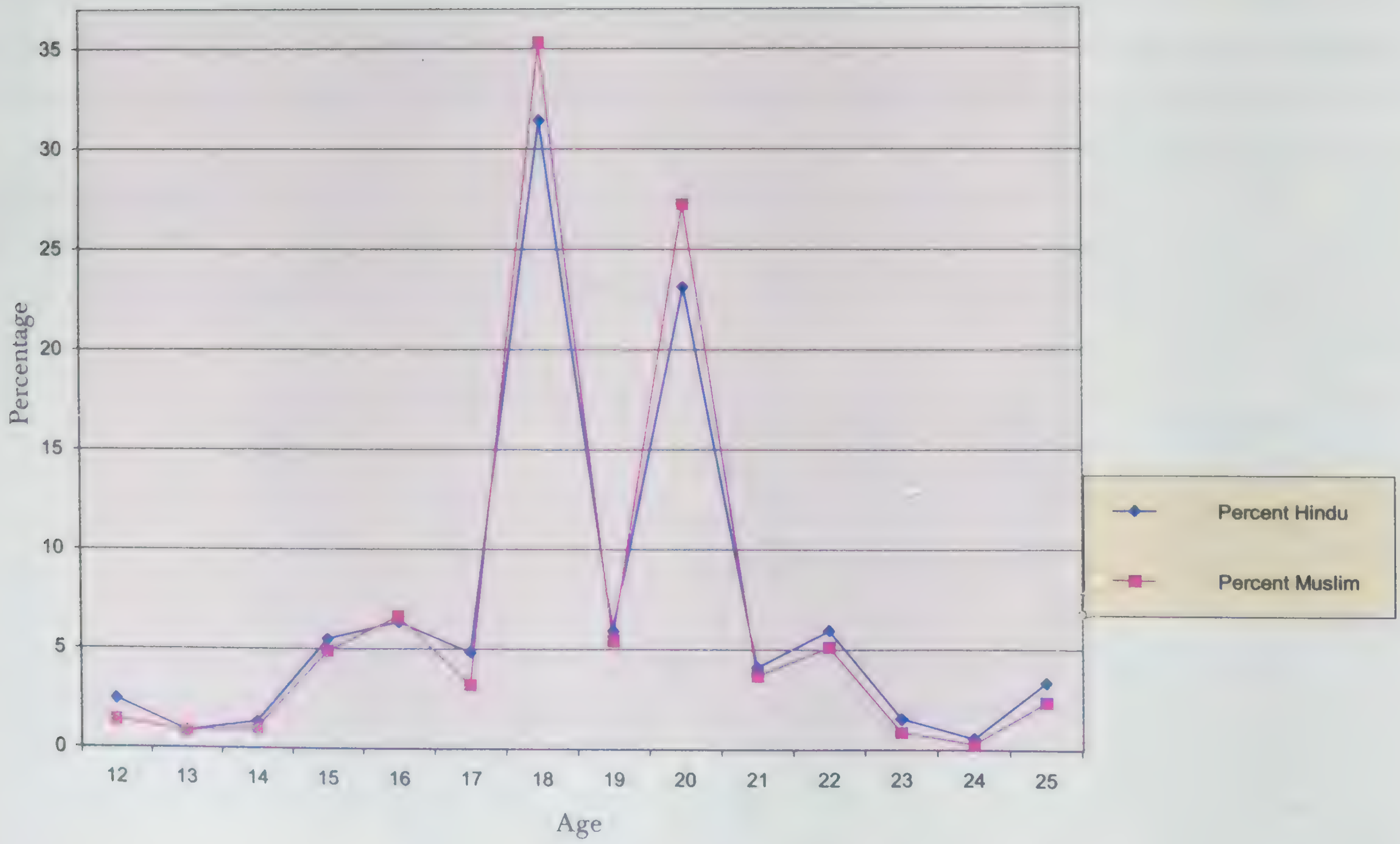


Chart 4
Awareness of Minimum Legal Age at Marriage for Boys

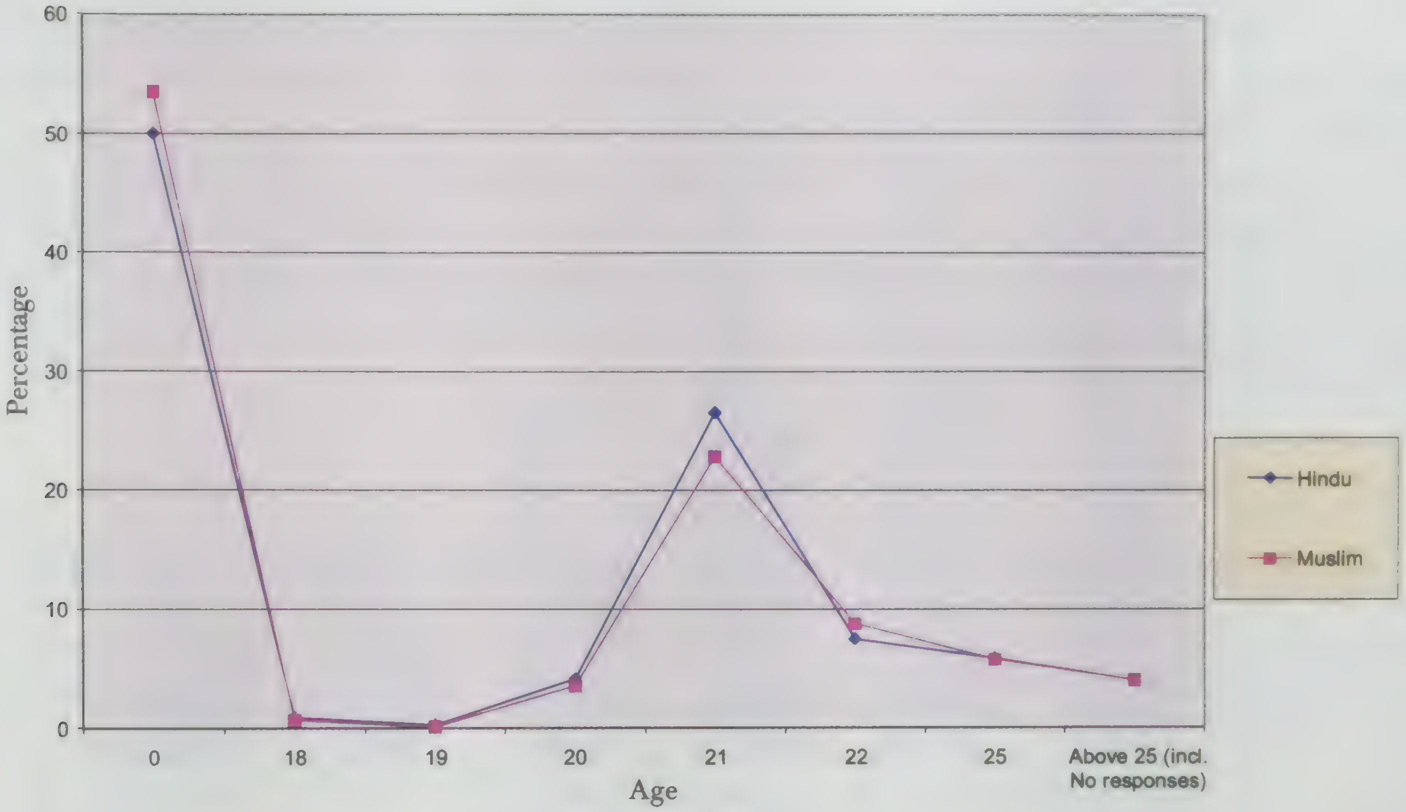
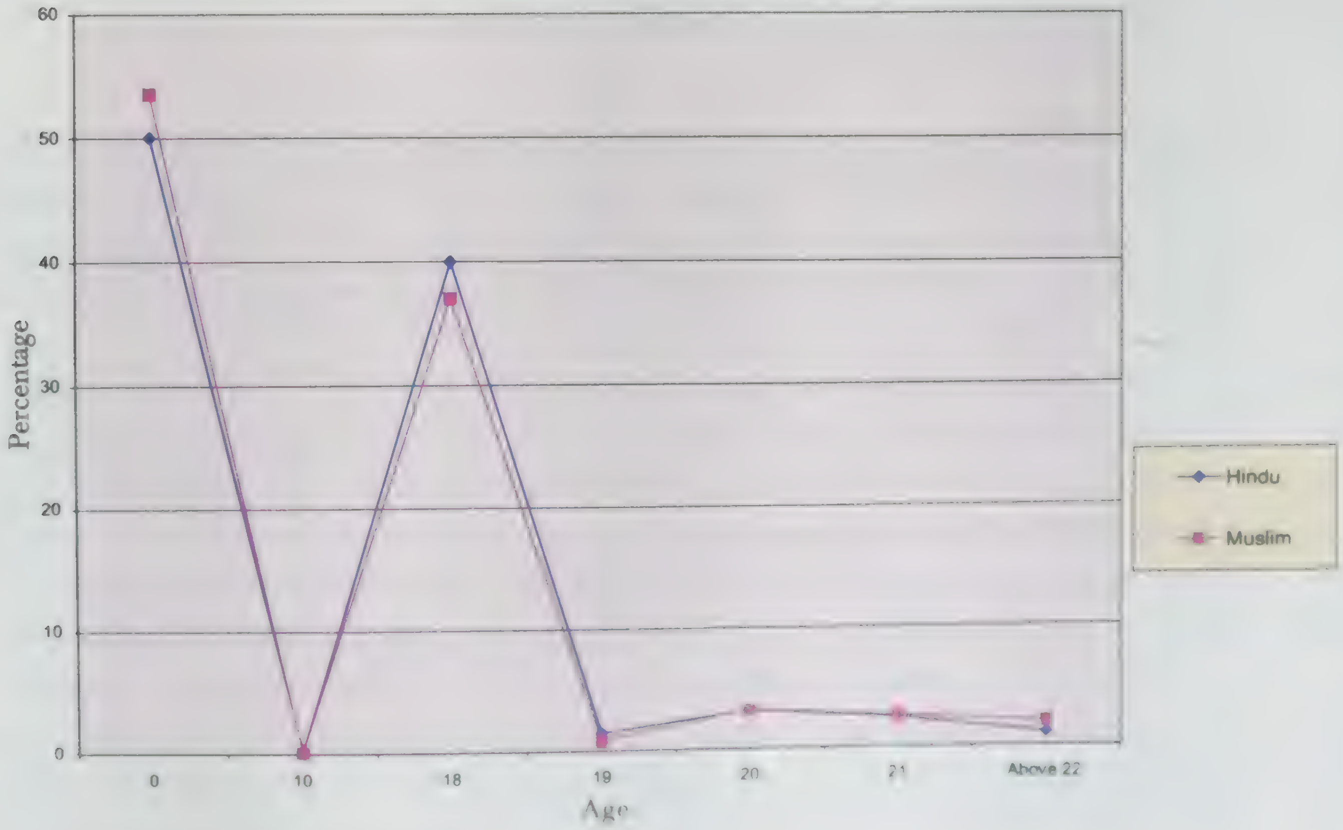


Chart 5
Awareness of Minimum Legal Age at Marriage for Girls



As far as the legal age of marriage for boys is concerned, half of the Hindu respondents, and a little over that of Muslims, had no awareness of it. Only about 25 per cent in both communities correctly reported the legal age, indicating not community differences so much as widespread ignorance, further reinforcing the view that marriage is one of those critical events in people's lives that is regulated more by customary practice – especially with regard to Muslim women – and gender than it is by either class, community or religion – or, for that matter, by the law.

Nevertheless, one finding from our data is notable, and this is that awareness of the legal age of marriage for girls rises dramatically with an improvement in women's educational status; 81 per cent of highly educated women are aware of the correct age. Overall, awareness for girls is higher than that for boys, possibly because the majority of boys are married after the legal age, in any case.

Table 19
Awareness of Legal Age at Marriage for Girls by Women's Education

Women's Educational Level	Girls	Boys
1	23.26	14.01
2	26.43	15.33
3	40.62	22.00
4	55.81	38.11
5	73.69	48.15
6	80.58	68.82

1: Illiterate 2: Non-formal 3: Primary 4: Middle
5: Secondary and Higher Secondary 6: Graduate and above

The MWS did not specifically ask respondents about the circumstances of their marriage – that is, the choice of partner, age preference, and so on – but it is generally accepted that the question of choice with regard to marriage is practically non-existent for the vast majority of women. Decisions on when, to whom, at what age and in what manner to get married, are seldom in their control. In such a social and cultural context, where marriage and motherhood are seen to be the primary objectives of a woman's life – her "career" if you like – it is almost inconceivable that she will oppose either the option itself, the partner chosen for her, or the circumstances in which her marriage takes place. It might seem an indulgence, then, to seek answers to attitudinal questions on the subject; nevertheless, we did put some questions to our respondents on their reasons for preferring to follow the legal age norm, or a "delayed" marriage, and our findings are presented below.

Across the country, roughly half – 46 per cent for Hindus, and 47 per cent for Muslims – our respondents favoured late (21+ years) marriages for boys so that they could earn and support families adequately; followed by 11 per cent who said it was the ideal age; and 9 per cent who believed that they would by then also be "mentally and physically

Chart 6
Proportion that is Correctly Aware of Legal Age at Marriage

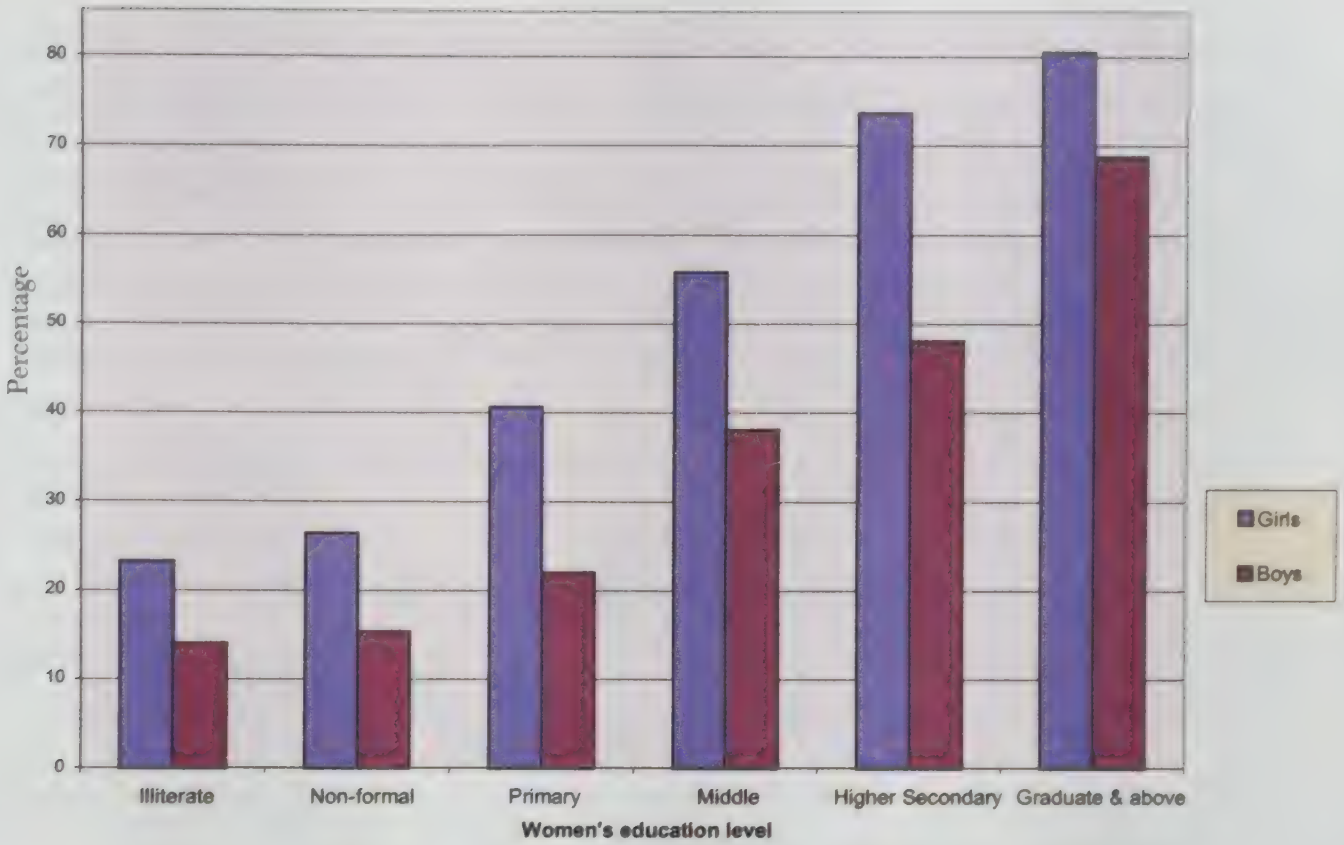


Table 20
Reasons for Ideal Age at Marriage for Boys

	Religion-caste groups					Total
	SC	ST	OBC	HC	M	
Completed studies	4.98	9.96	6.61	8.54	5.51	6.61
Starts earning	44.95	53.51	42.90	49.42	47.12	45.85
Able to maintain family	7.59	2.74	7.54	7.47	6.00	7.07
Tradition	3.73	7.11	3.27	0.81	2.72	3.10
Legal age	2.97	4.48	2.10	3.99	4.57	3.17
Becomes mentally and physically mature	8.46	7.58	8.85	11.31	8.18	9.02
Ideal age	13.60	1.19	13.73	6.34	9.01	11.03
Can get suitable match	5.56	7.78	5.73	8.47	8.87	6.71
To avoid chance of love affairs	1.40	1.37	0.66	0.66	1.15	0.99
Don't know/Can't say	0.05	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.12	0.03
Others	1.28	0.35	0.64	0.15	0.45	0.70
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

mature". These reasons were given priority over other considerations, such as education, tradition, and so on. Inter-community differences were negligible; while regional variations indicated that respondents in the south were marginally less concerned about earning capacity.

Reasons for preferring later – read legal – marriage for girls had a more mixed response, with the greater percentage of women, 23 per cent, and notably, 22 per cent Muslim women, citing "no problem during childbirth" as the main reason, followed closely by "becomes mentally mature". These two predominant factors are supported by chances of a better education 10.3 per cent; "tradition", 7.5 per cent; followed by a clear endorsement of 18 and above as being the "ideal" age at 7.4 per cent. The exception to this is west India, where the distribution is more even, as evident in the table.

Table 21
Reasons for Ideal Age at Marriage for Girls

	Religion-caste groups					Total
	SC	ST	OBC	HC	M	
Can get good education	7.72	11.70	10.62	14.82	9.19	10.39
Can get good match	4.14	1.78	4.38	2.88	4.90	3.95
Can manage family	6.64	4.80	3.75	8.13	7.72	6.03
Tradition	7.72	13.41	9.26	3.61	5.62	7.49
Legal age	3.55	2.93	2.45	7.72	4.68	4.09
Becomes mentally mature	9.58	18.77	14.98	12.58	13.06	12.85
No problem during childbirth	27.26	14.29	22.52	20.20	22.01	23.00
Ideal age	5.02	13.89	5.28	12.47	8.41	7.44
Problem in getting good match	4.87	0.50	7.56	3.20	3.50	5.00
Good match at early age	0.62	0.26	2.95	0.60	1.33	1.44
Right age at marriage	1.27	2.78	1.98	2.50	2.66	2.00
Reduce burden on parents	3.70	4.26	1.71	2.44	3.13	2.78
Life enjoyment	0.00	0.00	0.06	0.08	0.17	0.06
Less dowry at early age	1.11	0.00	0.37	0.00	0.49	0.52
To avoid chance of a love affair	5.63	7.34	2.60	2.85	3.29	3.92
Can take care of family responsibilities	7.04	1.46	4.63	3.13	5.64	5.04
Came to know from TV	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.02	0.00
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Table 22
Reasons for Ideal Age at Marriage for Girls: North Zone

	Religion-caste groups					Total
	SC	ST	OBC	HC	M	
Can get good education	4.79	0.00	7.44	17.57	6.18	7.73
Can get good match	4.41	0.00	5.34	2.42	6.33	4.59
Can manage family	5.50	3.26	0.82	3.92	4.24	3.37
Tradition	12.00	0.00	11.36	3.94	6.18	9.73
Legal age	1.86	9.84	1.65	7.13	2.00	2.71
Becomes mentally mature	10.13	21.32	15.42	20.79	17.45	14.64
No problem during childbirth	25.31	19.69	24.59	17.61	19.93	23.22
Ideal age	1.55	22.95	2.10	8.43	5.68	3.58
Problem in getting good match	5.34	3.26	9.48	4.88	4.81	6.70
Good match at early age	0.93	0.00	2.78	0.00	1.12	1.48
Right age at marriage	0.93	0.00	0.60	1.13	2.56	1.00
Reduce burden on parents	3.79	0.00	2.41	0.93	2.69	2.67
Life enjoyment	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.09	0.01
Less dowry at early age	1.86	0.00	0.52	0.00	0.83	0.95
To avoid chance of a love affair	7.51	19.69	3.61	3.18	4.18	5.28
Can take care of family responsibilities	7.82	0.00	5.18	3.75	7.39	6.07
Came to know from TV	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.02	0.00
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Table 23
South Zone

	Religion-caste groups					Total
	SC	ST	OBC	HC	M	
Can get good education	22.02	0.00	17.64	8.66	10.90	16.45
Can get good match	5.55	16.67	1.31	1.08	3.02	2.57
Can manage family	5.49	0.00	6.34	10.61	5.25	6.50
Tradition	4.87	16.67	7.39	8.44	8.27	7.16
Legal age	1.25	0.00	2.36	5.30	4.48	2.74
Becomes mentally mature	15.28	0.00	13.95	6.39	13.18	13.06
No problem during childbirth	19.71	16.67	20.53	28.79	19.34	21.21
Ideal age	9.23	16.67	8.94	9.52	10.70	9.37
Problem in getting good match	5.49	0.00	3.93	1.08	5.68	4.11
Good match at early age	0.62	0.00	4.71	0.00	2.78	2.92
Right age at marriage	5.55	33.33	4.74	6.39	3.70	5.23
Reduce burden on parents	0.62	0.00	0.80	9.52	5.27	2.44
Life enjoyment	0.00	0.00	0.27	0.00	0.29	0.18
Less dowry at early age	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.34	0.04
To avoid chance of a love affair	0.00	0.00	0.27	4.22	2.57	1.01
Can take care of family responsibilities	3.68	0.00	2.62	0.00	2.64	2.50
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Table 24
East Zone

	Religion-caste groups					Total
	SC	ST	OBC	HC	M	
Can get good education	10.03	15.42	11.08	13.25	11.81	12.18
Can get good match	2.70	2.49	7.04	5.15	3.51	3.92
Can manage family	11.73	4.99	15.12	13.80	14.11	12.15
Tradition	0.00	22.90	8.08	2.69	4.10	5.58
Legal age	8.85	2.49	1.50	11.70	7.89	7.93
Becomes mentally mature	5.35	12.47	8.83	3.37	6.03	6.23
No problem during childbirth	37.51	13.39	36.83	17.76	26.83	26.14
Ideal age	8.14	12.47	6.29	18.72	9.00	11.82
Problem in getting good match	1.28	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.52	0.46
Good match at early age	0.00	0.46	2.25	0.46	0.98	0.59
Right age at marriage	0.24	2.95	0.00	3.69	2.51	2.06
Reduce burden on parents	5.58	7.48	0.75	3.14	3.26	4.25
Life enjoyment	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.23	0.25	0.12
Less dowry at early age	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.13	0.03
To avoid chance of a love affair	2.79	2.49	0.75	1.68	2.84	2.26
Can take care of family responsibilities	5.58	0.00	1.50	2.69	5.62	3.60
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Table 25
West Zone

	Religion-caste groups					Total
	SC	ST	OBC	HC	M	
Can get good education	4.69	11.40	12.00	15.21	10.41	10.87
Can get good match	3.89	0.00	4.40	0.00	6.44	2.95
Can manage family	3.89	5.70	7.05	4.55	3.43	5.23
Tradition	0.00	0.00	3.28	1.55	4.65	1.89
Legal age	5.49	0.00	7.12	1.55	5.19	4.40
Becomes mentally mature	8.68	32.90	18.07	16.18	19.27	17.46
No problem during childbirth	25.75	12.87	8.79	27.23	17.56	18.24
Ideal age	16.37	11.40	13.12	10.75	15.08	13.30
Problem in getting good match	9.38	0.00	9.28	7.65	5.33	7.39
Good match at early age	0.00	0.00	0.56	3.00	1.33	1.01
Right age at marriage	0.80	1.47	4.33	0.78	2.05	2.13
Reduce burden on parents	2.39	0.00	0.56	0.00	1.34	0.85
Life enjoyment	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.08	0.01
Less dowry at early age	0.00	0.00	0.56	0.00	0.47	0.23
To avoid chance of a love affair	6.29	11.40	3.28	3.78	2.04	4.93
Can take care of family responsibilities	9.28	5.70	7.61	4.65	2.43	6.53
Came to know from TV	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.16	0.02
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

An unambiguous gender bias is evident in these attitudes, with an implicit and explicit recognition that husbanding, householding, and breadwinning are male responsibilities, and reproduction, domestic activities, and caring for the family are women's jobs for which physical maturity is desirable but not necessarily anything else. The most cited reasons – making up 6 per cent of the responses – for girls' early marriage are: to reduce burden on parents; lack of education; and availability of a good match. Of the three, reducing the burden (most probably financial) on parents is the most pressing. A sub-set of responses is equally revealing; reasons such as "can get a good match", "reduce burden on family", "avoid chances of a love affair", and "less dowry at an early age" were offered by respondents *only* with reference to girls, and while indicating a preference for marrying them before the age of eighteen. Conversely, the importance of earning and being able to support a family is desirable *only* for boys, and this is generally borne out by the real-life experience of men: pubertal marriages are rare among them (we are not considering child-marriages here), and under-age marriages most uncommon.

The relative unimportance of higher education and paid work for women would seem to be self-evident to most of our respondents, regardless of community, because of their relative unimportance in accomplishing the task of reproduction, mothering, and looking after the family. On the contrary, obviating the possibility of an undesirable love affair, which would almost certainly jeopardize marriage prospects for the girl herself and might also bring social opprobrium in its wake, and guarding against "over-qualification" and consequently "disqualification" in the marriage market, are very important. This becomes clearer when we note that, for those women who expressed a preference for marriage at 18 or later, an important reason is being able to get a better education. This is especially so for Hindu women (who reported a much higher percentage) especially in the north and south.

If we relate this to our earlier finding that between 60 and 70 per cent of our sample indicated the desirability of later (above 18 years) marriage for girls, *especially* among Muslims across all four regions, its significance becomes obvious; that is, women seem to understand the link between later marriage and greater opportunities for educating themselves, with at least the potential for working outside the home should the need arise, even if they cannot actually act upon this realization. One should not overstate the case, however, because the most important reasons for preferring marriage at 18 still remain tied to motherhood and domesticity – a reduced risk of problems during childbirth, and being able to discharge household responsibilities satisfactorily.

A somewhat minor, but nevertheless quite significant, finding is that 75 per cent of all the women in our sample replied that the legal age norm is followed in their communities, a response that is belied by their actual ages at marriage. This inconsistency could have two possible explanations: either that respondents are referring to boys in their community (who are generally married above the legal age), or that *they would like to follow this norm*, as expressed in their preference for delayed marriages, noted earlier.

Reasons for *not* observing the legal age norm are important, and primarily the following: reducing the burden on parents; lack of education; and availability of a good match. Economic reasons appear to be more important for Muslims than Hindus but both are equally concerned about avoiding chances of love relationships.

Chart 7
Reasons for not Observing the Legal Age Norm

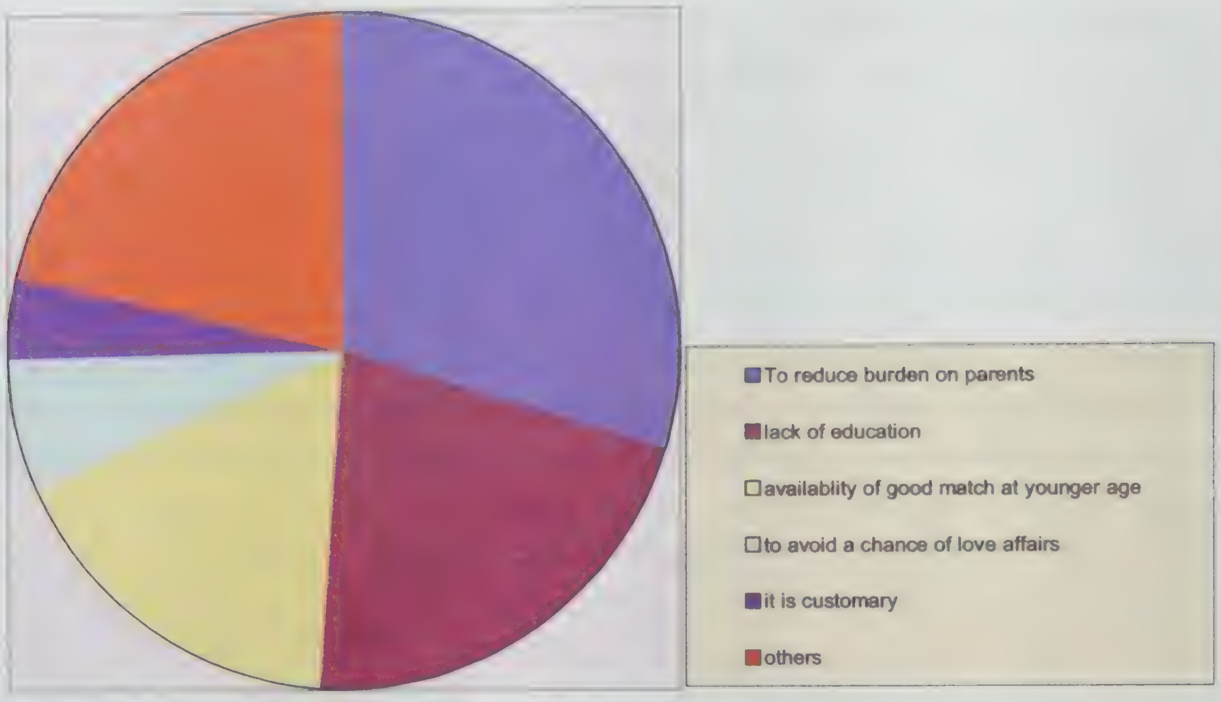
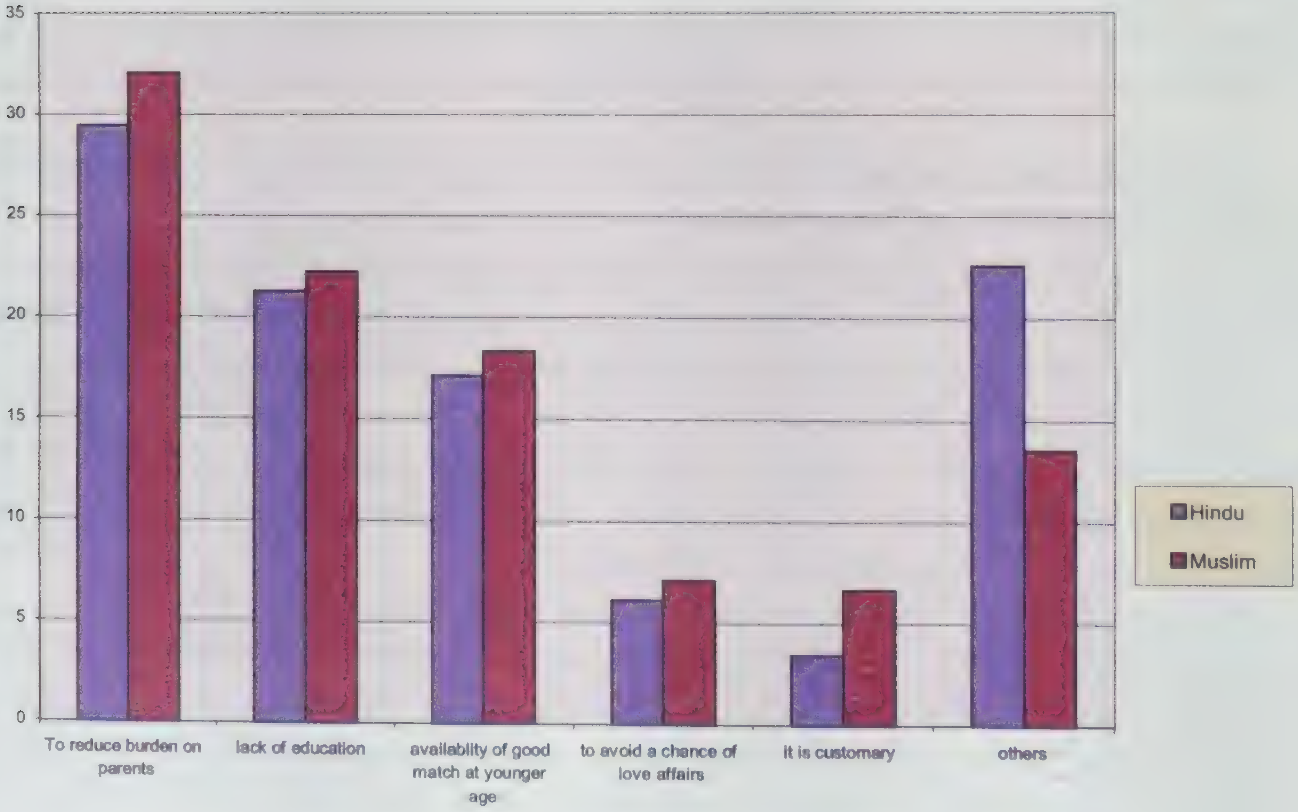


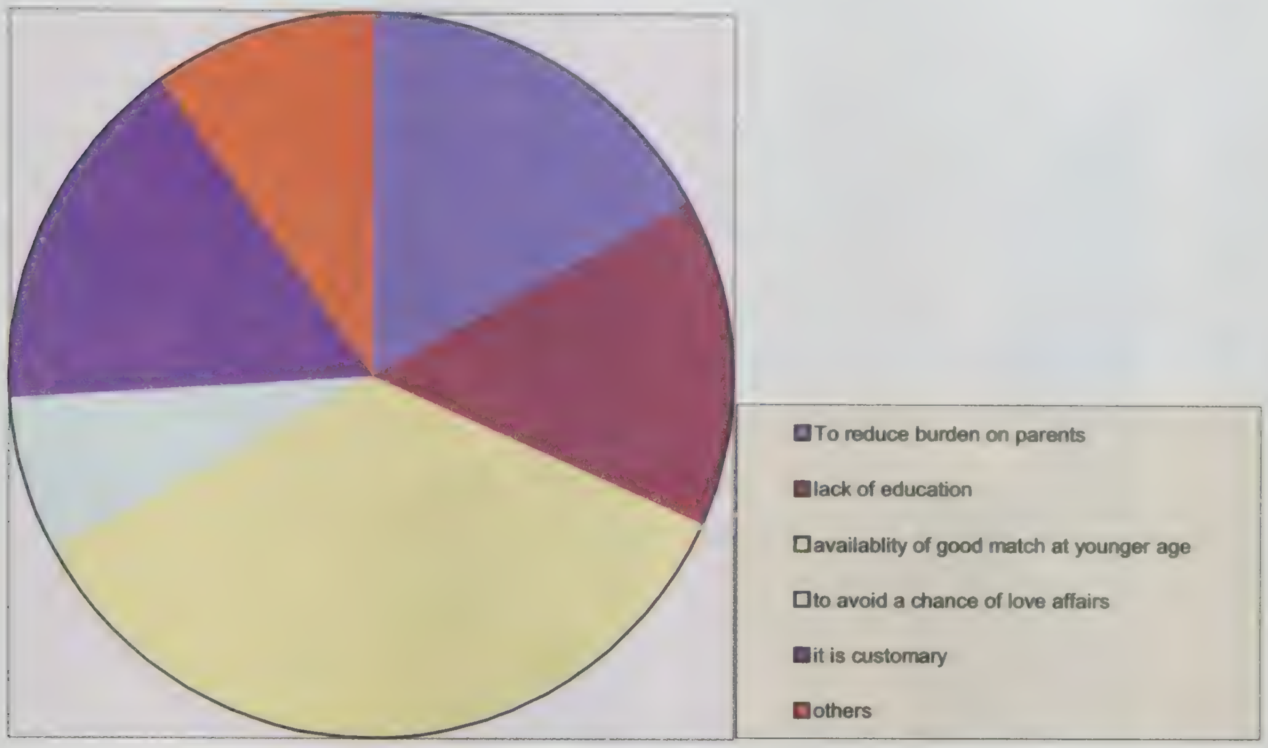
Chart 8
Reasons for not Following Norm by Religion



The significant regional difference here is in the west, for which the importance of the availability of a good mach outweigh all other reasons.

Notwithstanding all the above, it should be noted that recent surveys, including the MWS, have all reported a rising age at marriage for girls in the country. The NFHS

Chart 9
Reasons for not following the Legal Age Norm: West Zone



('98- '99) reports that in rural India, the proportion of women married by the age of 15 declined from 29 per cent for the age group 20–24 years, to 18 per cent for the age group 15–19. In urban areas, the corresponding decline is from 9 per cent to 5 per cent. The MWS has the following breakdown, by community and SES:

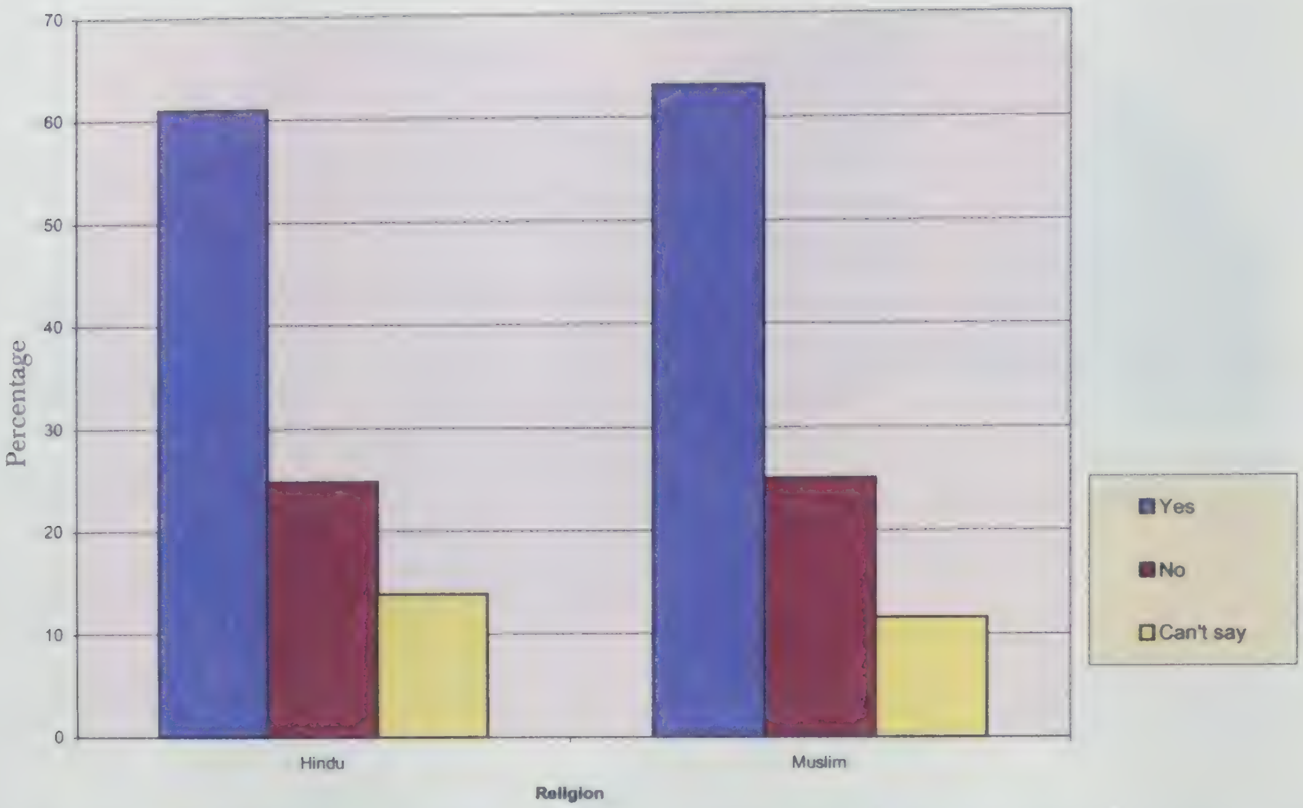
Table 26
Increase in Age at Marriage by Community

Religion-caste groups	Yes	No	Don't know/ Can't say	Others	Total
SC	57.92	26.36	15.47	0.25	100.00
STs	51.14	34.78	14.09	0.00	100.00
OBS	60.63	25.58	13.52	0.28	100.00
Others	68.05	18.67	13.10	0.19	100.00
Muslims	63.09	25.07	11.55	0.29	100.00
Total	60.97	24.99	13.80	0.24	100.00

Marriage and SES and Education

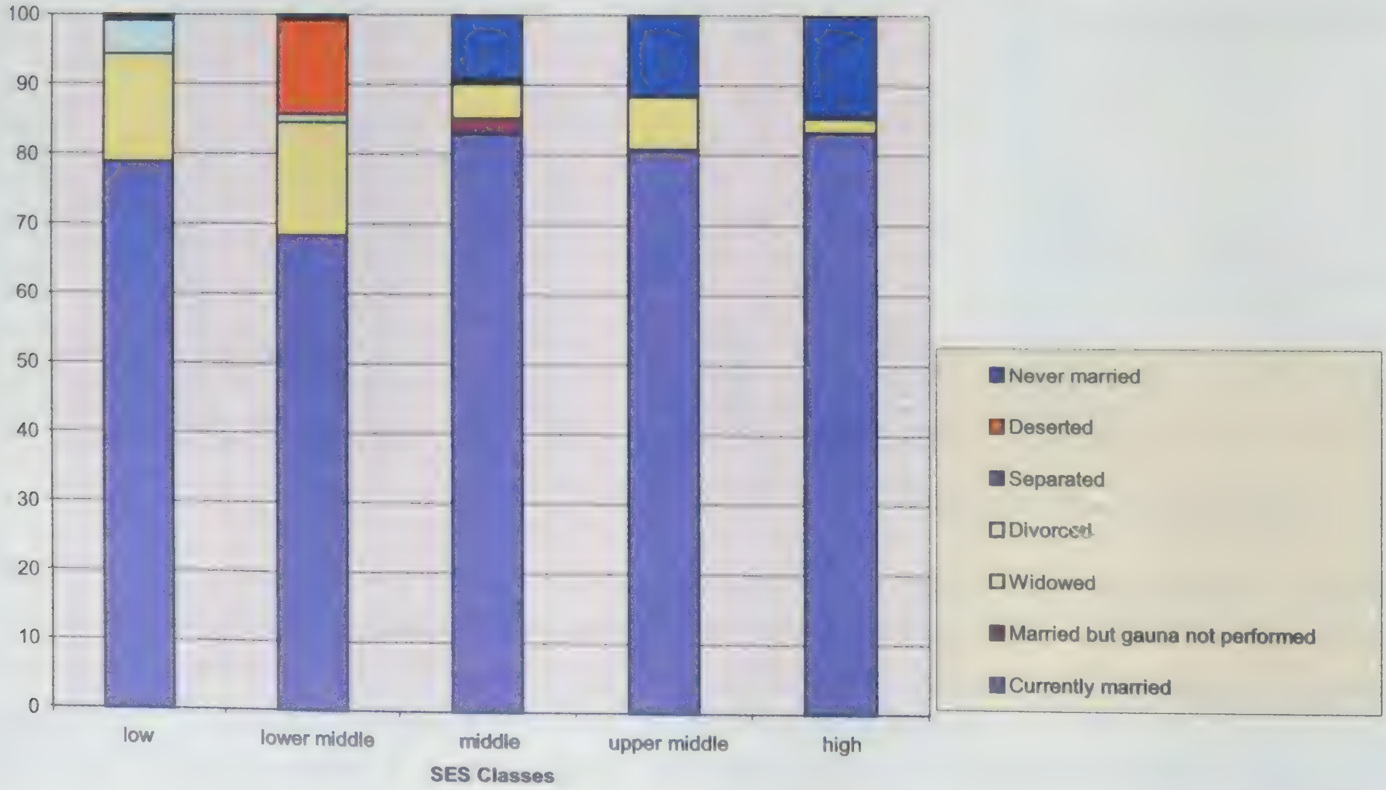
Does the respondent's standard of living or socio-economic status have a bearing on her never-married status? Our data seem to indicate as much, with the proportion of never-married women rising steadily as one moves up the scale. Regional variations are more or less consistent with the all-India picture the significant exception, as noted earlier, being rural south, where the proportion of never-married women is higher for all SES classes

Chart 10
Have You Found Any Increase in Age at Marriage for Girls?



(except the poorest) than the all-India average; and in the high SES category it is 20.3 per cent, corresponding almost exactly with urban south, but in reverse, where the highest proportion of single women, 19.5 per cent, belong to the poorest section. Another notable

Chart 11
Current Marital Status by SES: Urban West



difference is found in urban west, where there is a dramatic rise in the number of deserted women: 13.5 per cent and widows 15.4 and 16 per cent in the two poorest categories.[10]

Similarly, higher education and a higher age at marriage do not necessarily imply that women enter the workforce; Kerala, for instance, has a very high percentage of women who have completed high school, has a mean age at marriage of 20 years according to the NFHS, but one of the highest unemployed or not-at-work percentages for women in the country. This could of course be because employment opportunities for women are limited, forcing a huge female out-migration from the state, and consequently depressing employment figures within the state.

CONCLUSION

What is evident from our discussion is that the one more or less constant feature in the lives of Indian women, regardless of class, caste, community, and region, is marriage. As noted earlier, 95 per cent of all women are married by the age of 25, and motherhood follows soon after marriage.[11] In the MWS more than 65 per cent women reported they were unable to access government health centres, either because they were too far or because the facilities were inadequate. The implications of all these even for women's reproductive health status are self-evident. According to the Census of India, 1991, the average number of children Indian women bear is 3.7; the MWS reports that Muslim women, on average, have more living children, 3.5, than Hindu women, 2.8. Of those who are married, over 85 per cent remain married till they are widowed; and less than one per cent of all women, urban and rural, are divorced according to both the NFHS and the MWS. It would be correct then to say, that, for the better part of their lives (45 years on average) the unvarying norm for the majority of women is their marital status. They may be working, self-employed or unemployed, students or otherwise, at different stages of their lives; they might conceivably change their regional location and even their class status, but only a minuscule proportion is likely to see a change in their marital status.

It can be argued then, that, the significance and impact of this single fact is much greater for women than it is for men, in general. Marriage – and exogamous marriage, in particular – is a watershed event for all women, attended by all manner of changes in their lives. Any number of anthropological and sociological studies attest to this, while folk and popular marriage songs allude to both the pitfalls and small pleasures of this change of status. Culturally, women are groomed for marriage through a range of prescriptive injunctions and normative practices, and are socialized into accepting marriage and motherhood as their principal, if not their only, lifelong career. Housework, child-bearing, and rearing, caring for the aged and ailing, and working to supplement family income generally proceed in that order. (All-India, women's WPR is 20 per cent in the MWS.) Very young girls are initiated into this role very early, by learning to look after younger siblings, cooking, and tending the house and learning, moreover, to accept their subordinate status as a biological given.

In addition to poverty, early marriage is an important reason for discontinuing education as far as young girls are concerned. If the mean age at marriage for Indian women is 15.6, chances that they will complete their high school education are slim. The MWS data indicate that financial constraints – 36 per cent; married off – 22 per cent; and parental objection –

20 per cent, accounted for Muslim girls in our sample dropping out. We have already noted a correlation between early marriage and a low socio-economic status, and the percentage of Muslims in this category, all-India, is higher than that of Hindus. The rising graph for later age at marriage for Muslim girls, however, is to be welcomed, because it indicates a gradual improvement in both their socio-economic as well as educational status. Though the increase is slight (varying between one and three years, according to the NFHS) it is significant, and the likelihood that it will continue to increase is an indication of positive change.

The MWS findings indicate that economic structures alone do not frame women's experiences of oppression and deprivation nor is change in class structures and economic inequality sufficient to facilitate a just transformation. This suggests a need to identify the most important gender inequalities that constrain women; indeed, the inescapable conclusion from patterns in marriage, decision-making, and mobility is that marriage, motherhood, and housework are women's primary occupation. The sexual/gender division of labour is organized around this central condition, and all major decisions for the majority of women are either a consequence of or contingent upon it. It assumes even greater importance when we see that close to 98 per cent of women remain married for the better part of their lives. Divorce, desertion, separation, and widowhood accounted for less than five per cent of the single women in our sample, not including those who have never been married.

Extreme restrictions on mobility is one of the most disquieting findings of the MWS, with over 75 per cent of women reporting that they need permission from their husbands for virtually every activity, including, working outside the home. The process of discrimination and disadvantage thus comes full circle. Here again, community and regional variations are minimal, with even the relatively more favourable south and west conforming to the all-India pattern.

In most areas of decision-making, however, women are woefully dependent. Less than 10 per cent of respondents reported taking decisions on their own on major and minor matters, but a good 30–35 per cent did say that they decided jointly with their husbands, over 50 per cent said they were consulted on all decisions regarding the household, and Muslim women reported greater consultation than Hindus for all categories of decisions. Older women are more likely to be involved in decision-making than younger ones; Hindu-Muslim disparities are negligible, as are regional and class differences, indicating that the question of autonomy is gender, rather than community or class, specific. The decision-making index (DMI), like the freedom of movement index (FMI), graphically illustrates this disability, that is, the limited autonomy of women in all spheres. Women in general have very little decision-making authority especially when it comes to deciding about marriage, work, major purchases, and investments.

One issue on which almost all recent studies are agreed is the extent and pervasiveness of domestic violence in India. Its incidence cuts across caste, class, and community, and although it appears that the north and east of the country report greater levels of violence, this picture might change if actual, rather than reported violence alone, were assessed. The MWS is notable with regard to two findings: one that over 50 per cent of reported violence is accounted for by scheduled castes and tribes, who comprise the poorest of the poor. Backward castes are next at 24 per cent; Muslim women third at 18 per cent; and caste Hindus, 10 per cent. Second, over 80 per cent of those who admitted to violence identified husbands as the primary abusers. Younger women appear to be more vulnerable than older ones, less educated and poorer more than better off, better-educated women, but these differences may be due more to ready admission by these groups rather than an actual decrease in the violence experienced. Inter-spousal violence is thus both widespread and endemic.

The tendency to detach marriage from its institutional and material moorings and locate it in a purely sociological or anthropological, or even legal, discourse has, in a certain sense, obscured the critical and central role it plays in women's lived reality. Just a few observations on the findings of the MWS serve to illustrate this centrally.

Community differences in education, for example, are quite significant. Muslim women across the country are more illiterate than Hindus – 59 per cent of them have never attended school, less than 10 per cent have completed it. Very few Muslim women study beyond the primary stage and even fewer beyond the age of 15. The MWS findings demonstrate a strong connection between low socio-economic status and low schooling levels; in fact, financial constraints and a clear gender bias eclipse all other constraints on Muslim women's education. The north with high levels of poverty and low levels of schooling offers strong evidence of this unmistakable nexus – financial constraints are more crucial for Muslims and more so in the north than elsewhere, thus underscoring the subalternity of the Muslim population. But Muslims are not uniformly poor and uneducated; they are much better off in the south and also in the west and certainly better off than their counterparts in the north and east zones. The considerably better educational levels of Muslims in the south, and to some extent in the west, belie the view that religion denies them education.

The MWS did not canvass information on gender disparity in educational attainment, but several studies have drawn attention to the low educational attainments of Muslim men. Significantly, as many as 26 per cent of educated Muslim women have illiterate husbands– a peculiar feature of the community, an indication of the generally low levels of Muslim male education, and symptomatic of the pressure to impose a ceiling on girls' education. Completing high school renders them ineligible for marriage, giving rise to an anxiety that surfaces across the community, across regions. Since Muslim boys frequently drop out, girls who manage to reach high school are made to discontinue because an 'over-qualified' woman is unmarriageable.

A general devaluation of continuing education for girls is thus linked to the desirability of early marriage for them, as indicated by the mean age at first marriage which is a low 15.6 all-India; in the rural north it dips even further, to 13.9 years. However, even when, as in Kerala, the age at first marriage is much higher – 20 years according to the NFHS – this does not readily translate into a tangible improvement in the status of Muslim women in terms of education levels comparable to women in other communities or greater autonomy and mobility. Early marriage or "married off" was cited as an important reason for dropping out in our Survey. Taken together the gender specific reasons add up to a significant gender bias in education which works fundamentally against women. Poor families with male and female children are likely to favour their sons' education over their daughters', especially because girls help at home with housework and the care of siblings. When money is scarce even free schooling can be too dear, because travelling to school and the cost of clothes and books add up to unaffordable. Moreover, early marriage is an effective brake on girls' education, factors that never come in the way of boys' schooling. Young girls are handicapped by distance from schools especially once they reach middle school, when sex segregated schools are difficult to come by; this is often reason enough for girls to drop out. The sharpest community disparities are to be found in the high dropout rates for Muslim girls after the primary school level – when, in fact, their enrollment is equal to and in some states even higher than Hindus. This is the case even in the south and west – which otherwise perform better than the north and east as far as literacy and other indicators of educational attainment are concerned.

As noted, MWS findings point to a marked improvement in women's prospects, at least as far as education is concerned, with delayed marriage – by which is simply meant marriage by the age of 20 – but it is not difficult to calculate the benefits of delayed child-bearing, the possibility of acquiring some basic skills, some measure of autonomy, and a real increase in self-worth. Currently, the age at which the majority of girls are married off remains a full two years below eighteen, all-India, and as much as four to five years in some parts of the country.

The critical importance of marriage in Indian culture has also helped to reinforce the public/private dichotomy in women's lives. A clear articulation of the separation of the public sphere from the personal or private domain was made by colonial law which proceeded to enact a common criminal code for India, but codified customary practices with regard to marriage, inheritance adoption, divorce, and maintenance in accordance with religious precepts. By implication – and also by law – the public space was designated as secular, the personal as governed or regulated by tradition, convention or religious injunction. The post-colonial state retained this legal separation of private and public through the continuation of personal laws, even though they are in direct contradiction to the fundamental rights of citizens guaranteed by the Constitution.

The implications of this for women are evident and have been extensively commented upon, but let us consider what all these tell us about private and public. For all practical purposes, private signifies the familial or marital space and, by extension, the household sphere where male authority is not only socially and culturally sanctioned, but protected by law.[12] By removing the traditional family or household unit from the purview of customary practice, personal laws have privatized and sanctified the institution of marriage and the family, rendering them unamenable to public intervention of most kinds, including progressive action by the state. As Ratna Kapur and Brenda Cossman argue, "The legal regulation of women is informed by and serves to reinscribe familial ideology" with all its constraints and rigid gender hierarchies.[13] The private domain is where a majority of Indian women spend the greater part of their lives. For them, public space simply does not exist, or exists mostly in the abstract, for two important reasons: one, because their entry into the public sphere is strictly regulated by male authority, as the MWS findings demonstrate so clearly; and two, because even those very few women who do access it rarely do so as true equals. For most women, then, the public is often just an extension of the private, with all its hierarchies and biases. Just as the guarantee of equality remains unrealizable for most women, so too the right to freedom of mobility, of association and of travel is severely circumscribed by patriarchal control. This is also why, for women in the subsistence and non-monetised sectors of the economy, the domestic and non-domestic spheres exist as a single system and why home-based labour for women is usually merely an extension of domestic work, what they do anyway. Thus public and private patriarchies align, albeit unintentionally, to keep women in their place – subordinated. And in order to do so, the institution – and institutionalization – of marriage is essential.

NOTES

Note: Originally published in a slightly different form in Ritu Menon and Zoya Hasan, *Unequal Citizens: A Study of Muslim Women in India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

1. Gail Minault, *Secluded Scholars: Women's Education and Muslim Social Reform in Colonial India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998.
2. Nasreen Fazalbhoy, 'Sociology of Muslims in India: A Review', *Economic and Political Weekly*, June 28, 1997, pp. 1547–51.
3. Imtiaz Ahmad (ed.), *Caste and Stratification among Muslims in India*, New Delhi. Manohar, 1976. Also see *Family, Kinship and Marriage among Muslims in India; Ritual and Religion Among Muslims in India*, New Delhi: Manohar, 1980 and 1981.
4. On some aspects of gender and personal law issues see Zoya Hasan (ed.), *Forging Identities: Gender, Communities and the State*, New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1994.
5. Shibani Roy's study of Muslim women makes an explicit link between Islam and the women's subordinate status. Shibani Roy, *Status of Muslim Women in North India*, New Delhi: B.R. Publishers, 1979, Devaki Jain, 1981.
6. Hasina Hashia (ed.), *Muslim Women in India since Independence: Feminine Perspectives*, New Delhi: Institute of Objective Studies, 1998.
7. Mary John, 'Feminism, Internationalism and the West: Questions from the Indian Context', Occasional Working Paper No. 27, New Delhi: Centre for Women's Development Studies, 1998.
8. The 1998-99 investigation conducted by the NFHS on a sample of 90,000 women in India reported that 94 per cent of *all* Indian women are married by the age of 25, and that the median age at first marriage is 16.4 years – i.e., 18 months below the legal minimum age at marriage. Even more revealing, it reports that 61 per cent of *all* women (70 per cent rural, 40 per cent urban) are married before the age of 18.
9. Vahida Nainar, *Muslim Women's Views on Personal Laws: The Influence of Socio-Economic Factors*, Bombay: Women's Research and Action Group, 2000.
10. We may recall that in the early and mid-Eighties in Maharashtra, women's and peasants' organisations mobilised a Parityakta movement focussing on the high incidence and plight of separated and deserted women in the state, lending credence to this finding.
11. According to the South Asia Human Development Report, 60 per cent of Indian women are stunted and underweight in their child-bearing years, and eight out of ten are seriously anaemic during pregnancy; moreover, on an average, 50 per cent of lactating mothers in South Asia have a caloric intake of 70 per cent less than the recommended *minimum. Human Development in South Asia 2000. The Gender Question*. Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2000.
12. Martha Nussbaum, in Zoya Hasan, E. Sridharan and R. Sudarshan (eds.), *India's Living Constitution: Ideas, Practices and Controversies*, New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2002, p. 258.
13. Ratna Kapur and Brenda Cossman, *Subversive Sites*, New Delhi: Sage, p. 13.

CHAPTER 4

Understanding the Dalit Feminist Identity

Gopal Guru

INTRODUCTION

Much of the recent writings on dalits and their situation have failed to offer an insightful reflection on the dalit issue. This uneasy moment of silence in the mainstream scholarship is deeply disappointing both at the theoretical and the practical/political level.[1] This silence is not just an academic problematic, it affects profoundly the issues relating to dalit women. Dalit women are thus marginalized both within the academic discourse and in the domain of politics and participation. By implication, the possibility of a serious perspective on dalit feminism gets substituted by a self-comforting rhetoric that is deployed both by the state and the male dominated dalit politics in the country. For example, the dalit scholars as well as the non-dalit scholars have repeatedly argued that dalit patriarchy is innately democratic, which has in turn automatically solved the problems of dalit women in the country.[2] Such intellectual claims, it is evident, are more rhetorical than substantive in nature. In view of this rhetoric, which in a way has a capacity to convert hidden unreality into a self-evident truth, it is necessary to address the following issues that have acquired immense importance in the changing language of dalit discourse in the country.[3]

First, what are the core issues that seem to be assigning shape and substance to dalit feminist identity? What is the normative content of this identity? In other words, what is the nature and quality of the substance that goes in forming dalit feminist identity? If the dalit feminist identity has a normative substance then to what extent does this substance overlay the identity in question? In other words, to what extent does this identity enjoy the recognition both from the dalit patriarchy on the one hand and mainstream feminism on the other? Do the forces existing outside the dalit feminist identity, facilitate or prevent the overflow of this normative substance?

Second, it is important to examine, to what extent dalit patriarchy tends to contain the democratic overflow of dalit feminist identity. That is to say, to what extent is it democratic in recognizing the democratic aspiration of dalit women? Does it possess democracy as an innate virtue? Does it emerge on its own moral strength from conviction or is it democratic only in relative terms? What is the quality of the reference point against which it is being adjudged as democratic? Finally, what is the dalit feminist perception of the self? To what extent does this self-perception militate against the one that is constructed by the adversarial forces both from within (dalit patriarchy) and outside (social patriarchy) the dalit situation? In other words, to what extent does the dalit feminist oppositional imagination assign transformative meaning to the dalit feminist identity? Is this imagination devoid of dalit male shadow? What is the ontological basis of this oppositional imagination? What are its social sites on which it is resurrected? These are the three sets of question that are dealt with in this paper.

CORE ISSUES IN DALIT FEMINIST POLITICS

According to 1991 figures Dalit women constitute a little less than 50% of the total dalit population, which is 16.8% according to 1991 census. Dalit female population is roughly less than half of the total dalit population – 922 women per thousand men.[4] Female literacy rate in the dalit community is 23.8% which is significantly less when compared to the general female literacy rate that is 39.3%.[5] In fact, if one looks at these literacy levels among the dalit women retrospectively, then one would find the recent figures quite impressive against 3.35 in 1961.[6] However, these figures do not show either the level of higher education among the dalit women or the dropout rate that is quite significantly high among dalit girls within the community.[7]

In terms of participation in the working force, Dalits constitute 39% of the workforce of the country. Dalit women form half of this segment. These women are found engaged in both the rural and urban sectors. The so-called rural/urban categories (in fact constituted by the State) are rather placid categories and do not enable us to identify the problem. I propose to introduce a different set of categories that would give us greater insight into the reality of dalit women in the Indian economy. Dalit women are engaged not only in the rural/urban sectors but they are engaged in the polluting and non-polluting sectors. Agriculture, which includes cane harvesting as well, construction industry, brick industry, tea plantation could be called as the non-polluting sector and this sector obviously accommodates the larger size of dalit women in the country. Within the polluting sectors that comprise scavenging, sanitation, tanning and ever-growing rag picking exclusively belong to the dalit women only. Thanks to the so-called environmentalist and the multinational corporations that are promoting the rag picking rather indirectly in the country. However, we will come back to this in the following sections.

It can be rather absurdly argued that as compared to the non-polluting sectors, the polluting sectors probably constitute a preferable option to the dalits for two reasons. First, due to the pollution factor, these sectors have become ironically almost the monopoly preserve of dalit women. Secondly, these sectors offer relatively more stable source of livelihood as compared to the agriculture sectors, which provide only seasonal employment particularly in the non-irrigated sectors. Thirdly, the unorganized sectors like rag picking fetch more wages to dalit women than to their dalit male colleagues. According to a new study, female rag pickers get between 80 and 110 rupees per day.[8] This is comparatively better as compared to the agriculture sector, which operates on a discriminatory wage structure thus giving a clear edge to dalit males over females in terms of wages. The more important question is: at what cost? For one, a total fragmentation of their personality by reducing them to the level of an inferior being, enslaved in a polluting occupation. The polluting logic of this sphere renders them completely invisible as it denies them any meaningful existence as a human being. Their self-confidence and self-respect are crushed beyond redemption as young dalits are forced to suffer from this stigma collectively even if they do not perform stigmatized job themselves. This prevents them from appearing in the public realm without a sense of shame. In this regard it would be quite agonizing to note what P. Sainath has to say about the scavenger's girl from Rajasthan.[9] Sainath's study shows how the upper caste girls make the life of the dalit girl miserable by inflicting on the latter humiliating comments. "*Bahangan Ai re bahgan aire*", the upper caste girls sing in chorus so as to force a kind of social death on the victim who is forced to withdraw from the school and ultimately from the public realm.

Thus dalit women are stuck in the rag picking business not because they love it but because they do not have a dignified alternative. They are forced into scavenging, rag picking and scrap collecting as these alone serve as stable sources of livelihood for dalit women.[10]

Dalit women form the majority of rag pickers and are scattered in the major cities of the country. Rag picking, like scavenging as seen above, causes social, psychological and physical kinds of injuries to dalit women. In addition, the dalit woman rag pickers suffer from physical injuries that they sustained while collecting the garbage. These involve serious glass cut and iron cut injuries from dangerous chemicals. In order to avoid possible injuries, dalit women take TT injections as precautionary measures. But this does not stop other forms of exploitation that the dalit women have to undergo. The contractors and the wholesale dealers in 'scrap business' cheat them in weighing of scrap and paying them less to the ultimate recycled role of scrap. Interestingly, these dealers are also from the same dalit caste. They progress at the cost of dalit women's toil and labor. The dalit women are paid quite less compared to the huge margin of profit that the dalit dealer makes in the whole deal. Although, we do not have the actual statistics of this volume of profit, but we can see these dealers rising fast from the 'rag to riches'. In addition to this material exploitation, the dalit women suffer from psychological injuries, which leave permanent scars on their heart, mind and body. What are these scars and social injuries that the dalit women endure while collecting the garbage? These include social indignities hurled on them by the police, and the middle class women and men. These dalit women are also suspected to be potential thieves. They are not distinguished from stray animals like dogs and cattle and pigs that also feed from the same garbage heap. It is in this sense that the dalit women become socially invisible to the society. Third, dalit women are also the victim of the "law of self-exploitation", that is to say, dalit women torture themselves and their bodies by overwork. They work from 4 am to 8 pm in the evening. The long hours have partly to do with the need to protect the garbage zones from intruders. Finally and more importantly, rag picking seals all the prospects of dalit women who once in the garbage business are stuck to it. She cannot get employment elsewhere even if she decides to take up one. Interestingly, upper caste households do not employ dalit women with a rag picking background. They argue that rag picking reinforces the degree of pollution in the dalit women and hence they cannot be employed in the domestic realm.[11] It is also interesting to note that in the urban sectors, particularly in the unorganized one, there exists a division of labor within the ranks of maidservants. What one normally finds in these areas is the neat division of domestic work based on the purity/pollution principle. For example, upper caste women are normally employed in the kitchen for cooking while the dalit women are employed for cleaning toilet, bathrooms and cleaning floor which is called "*Zadu-Poccha*" in the northern belt of India.[12] It is not only almost impossible for dalit women to move from an unclean job to a cleaner one, it is also difficult to even move from one unclean job to another unclean job.

Dalit women face another problem, which is related to the existing knowledge system in the country. They are virtually excluded from the knowledge system that is otherwise controlled by the upper caste or the twice born in the country. They have been denied the chance to control the tools of thinking. Let us elaborate on this with some very interesting illustrations. In some parts of Karnataka dalit women are not allowed to work in the sericulture plantation. They are denied entry into seri-culture because they are of lower caste and hence polluting. Although dalit women have very distinct knowledge about developing seri-culture they are denied this chance.[13] Even in the cashew industry in Kerala dalit women are not allowed to work in the peeling sections.[14] Secondly, dalit women are denied the patent rights to the indigenous knowledge system relating to Ayurvedic medicine that they have exclusively developed. This patent is now being claimed by the Twice Born. This is clear from the findings from the Aurad block of Bidar district in Karnataka.[15] However, it needs to be mentioned that it is really the corporate interests that have destroyed the knowledge base of dalit women through destroying the traditional skilled occupations they had developed for so many years. For example, the Garware Nylon ropes have destroyed rope making, the traditional occupation that was developed by the Matang community in Maharashtra. Garware is making more sophisticated ropes for agriculture and this has completely affected the rope making traditional occupation of Matang caste from Maharashtra. Dalit women are being completely displaced form rope making and pushed into rag picking.[16]

In addition, the working of Indian patriarchy reinforces the degraded status of dalit women. The nature of physical violence and sexual violence against them ranges from disrespecting their bodies to mutilating them. It is the social patriarchy that is responsible for the trauma of dalit women, who are the targets of gang rapes by upper caste men.

However, it would not be fair to ascribe the devaluation of lower class dalit women to upper class/caste men only. The elite dalit women are equally responsible in condemning the common dalit women who according to the former lack rational consciousness or the capacity to make more informed arguments.[17] Thus, the educated dalit women tend to reproduce the same mechanism of domination against which they fought at the first instance. For the elite dalit women the common dalit women are a pathological case; they are likely to remain fettered in thick emotionalism. This, by implication suggests that they (elite dalit women) are the 'lotuses' that have achieved the honor of rising above the mass of mud. But how are these 'lotuses' and their environment seen by the dalit patriarchy? Some argue that dalit women enjoy a measure of democratic freedom because the dalit patriarchy is innately democratic in nature.

IS DALIT PATRIARCHY DEMOCRATIC?

Scholars working on dalit issues have recently suggested that dalit patriarchy is democratic in nature. Obviously this argument sustains itself not on its own terms but tends to derive its strength from the negative reference point of Brahminical patriarchy. The more basic question that can be asked is can any patriarchy including dalit be democratic? Is dalit patriarchy innately democratic? Who determines this? These are some of the questions that require explanation. In the actual practice dalit patriarchy looks relatively democratic. Dalit women do enjoy more freedom to resist against their erring husband. They are not reluctant to use force to counter male coercion. This can take place both in the private and public spaces. The instances of dalit women abusing and beating their husband publicly are common. However, it must be pointed here that the dalit women enjoy more freedom and autonomy against their husbands not because the dalit husbands are inherently liberal in their disposition, but because they are compelled to do so. This is for two reasons. The dalit women enjoy relatively more autonomy and freedom particularly in the domestic sphere. They enjoy this freedom not because they are committed to it, but this freedom becomes possible due to structural reasons. The parity in poverty ironically forces the husband to make some concession to his wife. For example, dalit women particularly from the unorganized sector do not have to offer any justification for not following the time schedule as decided by their husbands. Neither the husbands do any strict kind of policing over their wives. Since both of them are poor and are driven by the need to feed the family and meet most other essential necessities of life like health, education they cannot afford to go for cross checking in terms of time budgeting. For example, rag picker dalit women get busy right from the morning until late evening. The husband cannot impose any control on her because he does not have time and is also busy from morning to evening doing odd jobs. Thus it is the insecurity of work and the lack of fixed wages that determine the structure of controls and not patriarchy per se. Secondly, this also suggests that the dalit women have an unorganized sense of time that is driven by poverty. Thirdly, the surveillance of dalit women by their husband is difficult because rag pickers work within a shifting site. Finally, the nature of work and the process of work do not allow a dalit husband to establish male superiority over dalit female because he is also as skilled or unskilled as the dalit wife is. It is the same quality of work, mostly manual work that assigns the same status to both of them. In such a situation subaltern alit patriarchy is compelled to make concessions to the female in terms of self-definition (control over one's body consciousness). This can also lead to a hypothetical case such as this. Suppose the dalit male decides to withdraw from the process of production this would certainly help giving clear advantage to the dalit female. Or in the negative sense, the unorganized sectors of employment can lead to more parity in power relations within the dalit gender framework. But this hypothesis is less likely to prove its validity because the withdrawal of dalit men from the textile mills in Bombay has made them inferior to their women. As against this, parity in poverty or the parity in prosperity within the upper caste women also accords greater freedom to upper caste women.

At the moral level as well dalit women enjoy much greater freedom against their husbands particularly those who have taken to drinking and have neglected their families. This autonomy was clearly demonstrated by the dalit women who launched an anti- arrack movement in the states of Andhra, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.[18] The dalit women enjoy more superiority over the husband particularly in the moral economy situation. In a poverty stricken family, the dalit women take the lead in borrowing from the neighbor or the village lord. It is very rarely that the husband makes a similar move. He feels guilty for having used his wife as a shock observer in order to save his self-respect. This accords the upper hand to the dalit women. However, this is just a small advantage that looks quite spectacular when compared with the diabolical record (the practice of sati, of TTB) of upper caste patriarchy.

However, it would be quite naive to give a dalit patriarchy a bonafide certificate for nice behaviour towards dalit women. Let us examine the working of dalit patriarchy at the empirical level. What has been the record of dalit patriarchy at the empirical level? It is as bad as any other patriarchy in Indian society. If one looks at the male–female ratio within the dalit community one would easily observe that it is even more disturbing than the trends in the general population. According to 1991 figures it is 922 while in the case of the general population it is 927. Amartya Sen says that they are following the upper caste patriarchical model in terms of this ratio. It was actually very encouraging in the initial decades of India's independence.[19] It was 957 in the 1960s. Secondly, communitarian patriarchy has been particularly damaging to dalit women. This is graphically illustrated by the punishments that are meted out to dalit women in some of the northern parts of the country.[20] Dalit male are suspicious about the fidelity of their women. They marry off their daughters at an early age not because there is a child marriage system formally but it is indirectly influenced by the consideration of the issue of chastity. In addition to this, the dowry, which was absent among the dalits twenty years ago, now has become quite rampant among all sections of dalit community. Dowry seems to have affected all layers of dalit community. Even the landless agricultural laborer is taking dowry. Earlier in Maharashtra there was bride price that was being paid by the parents of the groom, a simple but healthy looking woman was the only consideration for the match some years ago. Another instance that seeks to humiliate dalit women is related to dalit patriarchal morality. Within the kinship circles a dalit boy is compelled on moral grounds to marry a girl who is equated with "left over food" that as a matter of mandatory cultural code cannot be thrown away but has to be eaten by the member of the community. A second and degrading metaphor that is being used is the metaphor of cow. (I suppose this is the general metaphor that is used for all the women in the country.) Examine this saying in Marathi. *"Deli gay ash Kay"* [21] (Literary, this saying tells us that it is hopeless to expect a better future for a cow which is being led to the slaughterhouse.) Within the dalit community a dalit girl is like a cow. Once she is married off she is left to suffer from the dalit patriarchical trauma without any help coming from any corner. In fact, ironically this helplessness empowers dalit women against their husband. Battering of a housewife is so common among the dalits that the only difference between the two situations is that among the upper caste retaliatory action by the wife leads to separation, while in the dalit community the wife beats the husband but they remain together. But this does not reduce the everyday forms of exploitation that the dalit women have to undergo at the hands of the social patriarchy and the dalit patriarchy. The question that needs to be raised is do the dalit women assert their power on the larger question rather than just beating their husbands at the domestic level? How do they react to their construction as inferior beings by the state and the dominant classes? And also it is interesting to ask how they organize their resistance (thought and action) against the dalit patriarchy? If yes, at what level? What is the nature of such oppositional imagination among the dalit women?

The dalit feminist response to the three-tiered exploitation is rather complicated moving in and out from the male shadow at the cultural and political levels. There is a measure of feminist solidarity within the dalit situation. There are for example, certain occasions that establish such initiatives that seek to transcend the secondary contradiction between the dalit mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law. The trade union activism within the dalit laborers seems to be offering the common meeting grounds for the dalit women to resolve their differences. This is evident form the study which shows that dalit women working in the 'wakahar' a tobacco processing unit did resolve their differences and fought against the tobacco owners collectively.[22] Secondly, dalit women not only show solidarity at the gender level (a class in itself) but also they seem to be elevating their sense of solidarity at the higher levels of class-consciousness (class for itself). This was evident during the great dalit land struggle that took place in Maharashtra in 1959 and 1964. In this struggle, the dalit women fought together with dalit men against the state that refused to allot the land to the tiller. In fact, on many occasions the participation of dalit women in this struggle was superior to dalit male for two reasons. First, dalit women showed exemplary courage and confidence during the struggle this was evident when some of them led the *morchas* in many villages in the Vidarbha region. For example, in Adsul village they were in the forefront in confronting the state for getting the land. Renuka bai Gawarguru, a dalit woman from Panchgao village, now in Telhara taluk, showed exemplary courage to dance on the DSP's vehicle near the Aadsul Pahat so as to force the latter to arrest the satyagrahi.[23] The dalit women's participation in this struggle was morally superior to men particularly in terms of the commitment to the cause and their tenacity to endure sacrifice. This was evident from yet another example–this time from a village in Amravati district in the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra. These women did not bother about their physical health and participated in the march for land, got arrested and subsequently went to jail. Some of them were at an advanced stage of pregnancy. It was in the jail that a dalit woman from Amravati gave birth to a child. At least at the moral level, this child would have made a perfect case for all the benefits that a more fortunate child gets when born in the aircraft these days. In continuation of their splendid tradition of sacrifice, the dalit women went ahead selling their only assets like goats and chicken and participated in the struggle.[24] In normal times it would have brought them relatively a handsome prize for their assets. They did not stay back to look after their goat. Such is the moral depth and stamina and caliber of the dalit women's struggle in Maharashtra. Similarly, during the long drawn Namantar struggle (renaming of Marathwada university after Babasaheb Ambedkar) dalit women were the ones who were also in the forefront in the jail. Last and but not the least, dalit women showed extraordinary courage to confront the Shiv Sena forces and in some cases retaliated with the "sainik". This was evident during the agitation in the villages like Lohari and Mundgaon Akot Taluka of Akola Ditrict.[25] They also showed extraordinary tenacity and refused to be misled by the Hindutvawadi dalits who wanted to mobilize dalit women from Nagpur region against the Muslims.[26] Dalit women were being suggested by some of the dalit leaders from Nagpur region that that they should not buy bangles from Muslim vendors. It was further argued that the latter were womanizers and posed a potential threat to dalit women.[27] It is clear from the above sections, that dalit feminist consciousness has the transcending capacity to move away from the lower level of culture to the higher level of political resistance. Secondly, it also showed that dalit women sought their self-definition through the struggles against the state and also against the Hindutva forces both from within and outside. They were not the passive recipients of state patronage but were fully capable of engaging with the language of rights, which found its radical articulation in potent forms of resistance and protest. Their relationship with the state was of high moral order in the sense that they did not make any calculated concession to the state with the hidden ambitions to become part of the state. Their critical distancing from the state empowered them morally not to lose their critical angle and it prevented them from dissolving into the everyday forms of petty politics that takes place for example at Lucknow these days.

In fact, dalit women seem to be seeking their self-definition through their understanding of the modernist projects. They are in their own way trying to carve out a more positive identity of their own. Their language has undergone radical changes. They would not say in Marathi "*Patil Padarat gha*" (Patil, please pardon us). They do not walk with a slouch any more. On the contrary, they walk with a straight bearing. This self-respect does not follow from the sobriety which itself results from feudal paternalism. Their self-respect, which flows from the ideology and memory of their struggle, is built up around the ideology of Ambedkar, not just his statues.

However this dalit feminist radicalism is not uniform and remained at least in the beginning restricted to Mahar/Buddhist women from Maharashtra. Other dalit women, particularly from the Matang community, are latecomers to this radicalism. However, it is not arbitrary that the latter chose to maintain low profile. It was socio-historical factors that were responsible for this variation in dalit feminist consciousness. The Mahar women, were not attached to the traditional occupation as the other two segments of dalit community, the Chambars and the Matangs, were. Hence the Mahar women got released much quicker from the constraints of (Jagmani) feudal patronage. Their background as unskilled landless agricultural labourers helped them get out from the system. They quickly learnt the language of rights and gave up the language of obligation to the feudal lords. And this language of right was forcefully articulated by dalit women in Maharashtra right from the 1930s and under the leadership of Ambedkar[28] they threw the Hindu Gods and responded to the call of modernity sounded by their leaders. In recent times, the other two groups particularly the Matang women have become very active both in the material struggle and also the cultural struggle. This is evident from their organization in eight districts of Marathwad.[29] They could respond to this mobilization because they lost their skilled occupation like broom, basket and rope making. Garware Nylon industry in a way helped them get out from this occupation. Garwares and more sophisticated ropes have taken over the rural market that still supplies agricultural implements to the peasantry. Thus, Mang women are also making serious attempts at self-definition.

In recent years the dalit feminist oppositional imagination is operating under the dalit male shadow. This could be seen both from formal politics and cultural politics in the state. What you have in the realm of formal dalit politics in the state of Maharashtra is that like any mainstream political party, they also have the women's wing of their party. Thus, in dalit politics of Maharashtra dalit women are submerged into Ambedkar RPI (women wing,) RS Gawai RPI (women's wing) and also the AthwaleRPI (women wing).

In the realm of cultural politics dalit feminist identity has been responding to a peculiar kind of "light and shadow show" that characterizes the unstable moment in the consolidation of self-definition of dalit women. In other words they make attempts to walk out from the dalit male modernist shadow into their own light but at the very next moment they are also found walking back into the same shadow. For example, one can notice the large and looming male modernist's shadow in the imagination of dalit feminism in Maharashtra. This is evident from oral renditions of songs and poetry among the dalit women from Maharashtra

Ghari Noko rahu Madhu Shalet Jai las Tule samjat Nahi
Tuha Bap adani Bhola, rupacha Khurda Mojala Nahi.[30]

In this particular song dalit women are advising the dalit "boy" not to skip school. If he does that (categorical imperative) he will not be able to count even one rupee in small coins. This folk song suggests that the dalit male will not be able to attain enlightenment. This dalit female song seeks to define enlightenment exclusively in terms of male. But the following folk song shows dalit feminist literary imagination walking out from the male shadow

bamanchi masti eika ga Bai maharacha talya Vital hoi,
Shalet Bhim baher rahi Tras Ghtela sikshana pai,
Jo je re Bala Joje.[31]

This form of folk literature in Maharashtra is known as Palna. In this song, a dalit woman is underlying the message that Ambedkar preached against Brahminical arrogance that was sustained by the ideology of purity-pollution. The autonomous dimension of this dalit feminist poetry is that while it took the cue from male poets, it made this poetry more powerful by adding words like " Masti" which did not form part of the original poetry of the dalit male poet. The positive dimension of dalit feminist cultural politics is that it has developed its own idiom for emancipation. This is also evident from the sentiments that are articulated in the following song, which has become their own after it was written by a dalit male,

Maya dari Nimb. Nimbaler Phuler
Baba Sahebanchy kothale Soanchi Zalar[32]

These lines suggest that the golden borders on Ambedkar's suit are more precious than the rose on the coat of Nehru. These are statements on the political contradiction that was so acute between dalit politics and Congress politics. Folk poetry, thus, reflected feminist perceptions on the contemporary political situation, rife with contradictions.

However, this kind of poetic imagination was not without ambivalence. Often cultural assertions slipped into the male shadow, which loomed large on the critical imagination of dalit women in Maharashtra. This happened at two levels. First, dalit feminist imagination was seriously misled by male rhetoric. This rhetoric completely blocked the self-reflexivity of the dalit women. Note the following lines:

Chandicha Mundarka Babsahebanchy Botata,
Bamnin Ghat kels Vish pajala takat.[33]

This particular ovi suggests that Ambedkar did not die a natural death and that there was a Brahminical conspiracy behind his death. This gossip was spread by interested parties not only in Maharashtra but also in the whole of India in 1956, and it still continues to occupy the dalit imagination in the country. Dalit women from this district did not know the cause of Ambedkar's death. Their source of information was the political leaders who tried to build up their support on the basis of such gossips.

Dalit feminist consciousness, despite its poetic power, seems to be lacking a sustained political dimension. There seems to be a continuous relapsing of the political into the cultural. Why does the cultural fail to sustain the political among the dalit women in Maharashtra? That is to say, dalit women from Maharashtra convert every political event into cultural event. Why is this so? For example, the dalit women who gather in thousands are informed by a consciousness that is not political but more cultural and communitarian. As compared to the land struggles of 1959 and 1964, the political mobilization of dalit women is completely overshadowed by the cultural domination of dalit communitarianism. The dalit women will be present in the gathering but would be talking about the domestic instead of the fiery speech being made by their leaders. They would wear good clothes, bathe their children, would like to see other people from the urban towns. But why they would not like to seek attention from the larger audience? Let us look at these issues in the following sections.

There are two sets of arguments that can be advanced for understanding this dilemma. One of the important reasons that can explain this is that the dalit community as a whole has completely failed to create a moral infrastructure. The moral infrastructures involve the unconditional appreciation of dalit feminist achievements and the recognition of their human worth by the dalit male. For example, one of the sensitive dalit sanskrtist Kumud Pawade has always complained that the dalit literary establishment in Maharashtra has either totally neglected feminist writing or condemned it altogether or acknowledged it rather grudgingly.[34] This patriarchical attitude devoid of moral resources to appreciate dalit feminists identity has led to the kind of taxonomical imbalances thus confining the dalit women to the narrow contours of the family, kinship circles and at the most village community or the weekly hats (bazaars) not beyond that. This vacates the entire space for the dalit male to occupy. Thus women do not have access to the larger world that could be aesthetically so charming and meaningful. Within the dalit community there is no public form of recognition that is gender sensitive and appreciative of the skill and initiative of dalit women. Thus dalit patriarchy, like any other patriarchy, lacks moral caliber. Thus the dalit community lacks moral infrastructure, which is based on the sense of unconditional appreciation. A dalit woman has little autonomy even when it comes to her self, her person and her external appearance. Any attempt at self-definition – even cosmetic – can evoke strong criticism from the dalit cultural police. The community at times can adopt quite barbaric forms of punishment, as was recently meted out to a dalit girl who showed courage to marry outside the caste circle. Even if a woman becomes a *sarpanch* – thanks to the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments – which gives her a little power, the sense of empowerment turns out to be short lived. Because immediately after she became *sarpanch*, actual power is taken over by dalit patriarchy embodied at a micro level in her husband.[35] She is hardly given the chance to enjoy and articulate this new initiative, for she is overshadowed by her husband who becomes the de facto sarpanch thus pushing her into the background from all the prominent spaces that accord visibility to a dalit women.

It is possible to argue that while the outer dimension of dalit feminist is radical against the state and the communal forces, but its internal dimension against its male dominated politics lacks this cutting edge. As far as dalit feminist politics in Mahrashtra is concerned, it still finds it difficult to acquire an independent political identity and still finds itself operating under the shadow of the male dalit politics.

In the contemporary period, their – at least the motivated one's political energy – is being dispersed, if not squandered away, in organization of dalit issues. On the other hand, the institutionalization of their aspiration through 73rd, 74th Amendment, though desirable, but has limited their capacity to storm into the citadel of domination – global and local power structures. Dalit women can storm into public sphere. Their assertion through 'Authentic Gansunwar' is proof to this new activism.

NOTES

1. Refer to the recent works by Mendelssohn and Vizany, *The Untouchables,* Cambridge University Press, 2000. Even the most flourishing dalit NGOs and their discourse have marginalized the question of dalit women.
2. This is the argument that is being made by dalit patriarchy in its polemics. There are numerous examples in the country.
3. The Durban Conference and the dalit NGOs who participated in that conference have floated a language of neo-liberalism, thus celebrating capitalism. Their new language indirectly suggests "Long live capitalism", because they too want to become part of the capitalist system.
4. Data Sheet, Planning Commission, Government of India, 2000.
5. Ibid. At the all India level dalit girl's ratio in terms of education is less than that of dalit boys. But it is interesting to note that in Kerala, the dropout rate of dalit boys is higher than that of dalit girls.
6. Data Sheet, Planning Commission, Government of India, 2000.
7. John Simon's paper presented at the seminar on dalits and livelihood issues, held at Wagmon, Kerala, on the 1st and 2nd of May 2002.
8. The survey carried out by Ganesh Mirugu about the rag pickers from Pune. His survey shows the income of rag pickers.
9. P. Sainath, 'This is the Way they go to School', *The Hindu,* Nov 28, 1999.
10. This is the observation made by the 'Kagat ani Kach Patra Sangthana' of Pune.
11. This observation was shared with me by one of the participants from Chennai who had attended the seminar on the Project of History of Indian Science, Philosophy and Culture, organized in collaboration with the Dept. of History, Calcutta University, Calcutta, on 5 and 6 of January 2002.
12. This has been the common practice of the urban middle class in the country.
13. E.N. Ashok Kumar, 'Dynamics of Rural Development', an unpublished Ph.D. thesis submitted to South Gujarat University, Surat, 1992.

14. Anna Lindbergh, *Sex Experience and Identity: A Historical account of Class, Caste and Gender among the Cashew Workers of Kerala 1930-2000,* Lund, Sweden: Lund University, 2002.
15. Interview with Kamal Karkare, a social activist working for 'Drushti', a Bidar-based NGO in Karnataka. 14th March 1999.
16. My own observation.
17. Gopal Guru, *Dalit Cultural Movement and Dialectics of Dalit Politics in Maharashtra* Mumbai: Vikas Adhyayan Kendra, 1998.
18. Dalit Women started this anti-arrack movement in states like Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. This movement was against the local liquor dealers on the one hand and against their own husbands on the other. In Maharashtra, dalit women staged a protracted *dharna* in front of the Collectorate in Parbhani, one of the seven districts in the Marathwada region of Maharashtra on 9 March 2002. This *dharna* was against the local liquor dealers.
19. Jean Derez and Amartya Sen, *India: Economic Development and Social opportunities,* Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 156.
20. Prem Chowdhry, 'Enforcing the Cultural Code: Gender Violence in Northern India', *EPW,* 10 May 1997, p. 1020.
21. This saying is still prevalent among the dalits of Vidarbha region of Maharashtra.
22. Sharat Bhowmik, 'A Report', submitted to the Dept. of Sociology, Bombay University, Bombay, 1995.
23. An interview with Namadeo Damodhar, 12 June 2000. Damodhar, who has now settled at Akot, was the active leader of this taluk before he joined as the *talathi* or the local revenue officer in Maharashtra.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
28. Eleanor Zelliot, 'The Mahar Movement in Maharashtra', unpublished Ph.D thesis submitted to University of Pennsylvania, 1969.
29. The Matang women are mobilized by the Manvi Hakka Abhuyan which is very active in these eight districts in Maharashtra.
30. Gopal Guru, *Dalit Cultural Movement.*
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid.
34. Interview with Kumud Pawade at Nagpur, 12 Jan. 1999.
35. Gopal Guru, 'Caste, Class and Power in the Panchayati Raj in Maharashtra', submitted to Institute of Social Science, Delhi 1995.

SECTION TWO

BODY/SEXUALITY

CHAPTER 5

Women, Health and Demography: Deficit of Women in India

Leela Visaria

The deficit of women in Indian population has been known at least since the first synchronous census was conducted in the British occupied parts of India in 1881. The deficit has not only continued but has got worse over time according to each successive census, with the exception of 1981 census when the masculinity ratio of the total population declined a little. According to the census of 1991, there were 32 million more men than women in India,[1] when in most countries of the world, women outnumber men by 3% to 5%. There are 95 to 97 males per 100 females in Europe, the United States of America and Japan, but 88 males per 100 females due to heavy male mortality in the wars.[2] India shares with China the phenomenon of deficit women or masculinity ratio indicating some 6% to 8% more men than women in the population. Both societies have traditionally been patrilineal and men have enjoyed a much higher status than women.

The continued deficit of women in the Indian population has aroused much attention about the causes or conditions that have led to such a situation. Before examining the causes, or the factors contributing to the masculinity of the population, the paper will first discuss the magnitude of the deficit over time, and the regional differentials in the deficit of women in India. Factors leading to the deficit of women or excess of men in the Indian population, such as under-enumeration of women (or in-migration of men), sex ratio at birth and higher mortality experienced by women than men at several ages, including the effects of practices such as female infanticide and female foeticide are examined.

MAGNITUDE OF DEFICIT OF WOMEN

The commissioners of the censuses conducted during 1891–1911 in the Indian subcontinent noted that there were about 1.5% to 2% fewer women than men in the population counts of those years. According to the 1901 census, for example, men outnumbered women by about 3.4 million in the total population of 238 million. The census commissioners of that period found the deficit of women quite anomalous compared to the situation observed in the European populations with which they were familiar, and they dwelt on this issue at great length in their narrative reports. Not only did they compare the trends in the sex ratios of population over time, they estimated age-specific sex ratios to discern whether there was any pattern in under-reporting or under-counting of women at certain ages and whether it could be attributed to social or cultural practices related to age at marriage, seclusion of women from strangers (or enumeration), etc. Female infanticide, practiced by certain caste groups in some areas of the country, was also discussed at great length, in several census reports. Similarly, sex ratio at birth and the possible factors that can lead to more masculine sex ratio at birth in the Indian population also received considerable attention in the narrative reports.[3]

Table 1 shows the population by sex, deficit of women in absolute number (or the difference between the total male and female population) and as percentage of total population for present day India, beginning with the 1901 census. The table also gives the sex ratio (male per 1000 females) of the population in successive censuses.

Table 1
Population by Sex, Deficit of Women in Absolute Numbers and as Per cent of Total Population, and Sex Ratio of Population in India, 1901–91

Census Year	Total Population Persons	(in Male Millions)	(in Female Millions)	Deficit of women	Percentage of deficit of women	Sex ratio (males per 1000 females)
1901[a]	238.2	120.8	117.4	3.4	1.4	1029
1911	252.1	128.4	123.7	4.7	1.9	1038
1921	251.4	128.6	122.8	5.8	2.3	1047
1931[b]	278.7	142.9	135.8	7.1	2.5	1052
1941[b]	318.4	163.7	154.7	9.0	2.8	1058
1951	361.1	185.5	175.6	9.9	2.7	1056
1961	439.2	226.3	212.9	13.4	3.1	1062
1971	548.2	284.1	264.1	20.0	3.7	1075
1981	683.3	353.4	329.9	23.5	3.4	1071
1991	846.3	439.2	407.1	32.1	3.8	1079

Notes: [a] Sex distribution of population of Chandennagar in West Bengal, Gonda in Uttar Pradesh, and Pondicherry was not available. The total population figure shown here is exclusive of the population in these territories.

[b] Sex distribution of the population of Pondicherry for 1931 and 1941 was not available. The total figures shown here are exclusive of Pondicherry's population.

Source: Census reports for various census years.

It is evident from the data that the deficit of women has progressively increased. From a situation when women were a little less than 2% fewer in the total population at the turn of the century, the deficit of women has increased to nearly 4% by 1991. In absolute number, men in the population count have increasingly outnumbered women so that the deficit of women has widened from less than 4 million at the beginning of the century to 20 million in 1971 and to 32 million in 1991. The magnitude of the deficit of women has increased at a faster rate than that of the population. The progressive deficit of women is evident in the sex ratio of the population: the masculinity ratio has increased from 1029 in 1901 to 1079 in 1991.

A slight decline in masculinity ratio of the population was observed between 1971 and 1981 and was seen as a promising sign that the deficit of women in India was finally beginning to decline. When, on the other hand, the 1991 census reported a small rise in the sex ratio from 1071 in 1981 to 1079, it was widely interpreted as a major cause for concern and indicative of a lack of improvement in the status of women by the demographers as well as women's groups in the country. However, it was important to know, at a disaggregated level whether the deficit was noted throughout the country, whether there were rural–urban differences, etc., before attributing the decline in the number of women to their worsening health status. In the next section, an effort is made to understand the regional diversity in the sex ratio of the Indian population.

REGIONAL VARIATIONS IN THE SEX RATIO

In a continental country like India, there are bound to be variations in the extent of deficit of women just as there are sizeable regional variations with regard to other population parameters such as birth rate, death rate and infant mortality rate. Table 2 shows the sex ratios of the major Indian states for selected census years. They clearly indicate that there is a regional pattern in the deficit of women as well as in the trend over time in the sex ratio within each state.

It is evident from Table 2 that the deficit of women in the southern states of Kerala and Tamil Nadu and to a lesser extent in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka has tended to be much less than that observed in the northern states of Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. The southern states and the northern states belong to two distinct contiguous regions. The states of Gujarat and Maharashtra in Western India have had a slightly smaller deficit of women than the national average.

Over time the sex ratio has become more masculine (with the exception of the 1981 census, as indicated earlier) in practically all the states with the exception of Himachal Pradesh, Punjab and Rajasthan. In these states the masculinity of the population was quite marked in the earlier censuses, over time it has become less masculine. The improvement in Punjab and Rajasthan is somewhat modest but Himachal Pradesh has shown a remarkable decline in the masculinity ratio. The relatively small mountainous state, whose population until recently depended largely on subsistence farming, has witnessed a marked economic development due to horticulture and tourism. Some population groups in Himachal Pradesh have been practicing polyandry and women have traditionally enjoyed equal status with men. The contribution of these factors along with the rapid rise in literacy and educational levels of both men and women in the last two decades to the declining masculinity ratio needs to be ascertained. Also, one needs

Table 2
Trends in Sex Ratios in the Major States of India, for Selected Census Years between 1901 and 1991

States	1901	1951	1971	1981	1991
Andhra Pradesh	1015	1014	1023	1026	1029
Assam[a]	1088	1152	1116	–	1083
Bihar	949	1010	1048	1057	1098
Gujarat	1048	1050	1071	1062	1071
Haryana	1153	1148	1153	1149	1156
Himachal Pradesh	1131	1096	1044	1028	1035
Jammu & Kashmir[a]	1134	1145	1139	1121	–
Karnataka	1017	1035	1045	1038	1042
Kerala	996	972	984	963	965
Madhya Pradesh	1010	1034	1063	1063	1074
Maharashtra	1022	1063	1075	1067	1071
Orissa	964	978	1012	1019	1030
Punjab	1202	1185	1156	1138	1134
Rajasthan	1105	1086	1098	1088	1099
Tamil Nadu	958	993	1022	1024	1027
Uttar Pradesh	1067	1099	1138	1130	1138
West Bengal	1058	1156	1122	1098	1090
All India	1029	1057	1075	1071	1079

Note: Sex ratios are estimated as the number of males per 1000 females.

[a] The 1981 census was not conducted in Assam and the 1991 census was not conducted in Jammu and Kashmir.

Source: Census of India, 1992:86-86, 102-5.

to ascertain whether the rapid increase in the level of education has led to increasing migration of men to other parts of the country in search of employment.

During 1981 and 1991, the masculinity of the Indian population increased by between 3 and 8 per 1000 in all the major states of India, except for Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and Rajasthan, where the increasing masculinity was over 1%. Bihar recorded a maximum deficit of women during this decade. On the other hand, the situation improved a little in West Bengal and in Punjab, which has had one of the most adverse sex ratios in the country throughout the twentieth century. The reasons for the regional differences in the magnitude of deficit of women need to be fully explored.

REASONS FOR THE DEFICIT OF WOMEN IN INDIA'S POPULATION

Ever since the deficit of women was noted in the population of India, there have been various hypotheses advanced to explain the deficit, and various factors have been explored to understand why India's population is masculine. The possible reasons are under-enumeration of women in India's population count, out-migration of females, greater excess of males at birth, due to various other factors including female infanticide experienced by Indian women compared to men. The likely contribution of each of these factors in explaining the deficit of women is analysed in the following sections.

Under-enumeration of Women in Indian Censuses

One of the first possibilities explored by the Indian census commissioners to understand the deficit of women in Indian population related to the differential enumeration of population of males and females. The British census commissioners of the 1891 and 1901 censuses, for example, thought that the 'concealment' of women was not at all unlikely in the Indian setting. 'It is conceivable that females may be omitted from the return, either because their male relatives regard them as of no importance in connection with an enquiry, such as the census, instituted by the Government; or because they have special reasons for not mentioning them, as in the case of girls who have reached the age of puberty while still unmarried; or because they connect the census with some imaginary ulterior motive on the part of Government, such as the desire to provide wives for its sepoys'.[4]

Although it was hard to find evidence to support any of these hypotheses, the early census reports did notice that the deficiency of women occurred at certain ages. The censuses, for example, reported fewer girls in the age group of 10–14, compared to the number of boys. Again, the efforts to understand this particular phenomenon led to a hypothesis that in a situation where child marriages are prevalent, there might be a tendency either not to report the presence of a young girl who was already married or a child bride in the family to the census enumerators or to inaccurately report her age as older than the real age.

There was some evidence for the latter practice. The number of women in the next age groups of 15–19 and 20–24 tended to be larger than that of the young men. However, the misreporting of ages, done either wilfully to conceal the child brides and report them as older than their real ages, or because ages were not known accurately, cannot lead to deficit of women. It implies that the women 'missing' at certain ages are there in the population; they are included in the older age groups or wrongly counted by the enumerators as older girls.

The possibility of any significant omission of women from the Indian census up to 1961 was dismissed after a careful scrutiny of data and evidence.[5] However, the issue of the possibility of under-counting of women has resurfaced again after the 1991 census results. The progressive decline in the sex ratio in certain regions of the country has led some scholars to state that there has been an under-counting of women in certain backward districts and states of the country in the wake of decline in their law and order situations. The case in point is Bihar, the second most populous state in India, with a population of 86 million at the 1991 census count. As indicated earlier and shown in Table 2, increase in the masculinity of Bihar's population has been the sharpest among all the major states of India.

In Bihar the sex ratio rose between 1981 and 1991 by 41 points from 1057 to 1098 (or by 3.9%) and the change was largely confined to rural areas. Almost 51% of the decline in the proportion of women during 1981–1991 in the country is attributable to Bihar. It is difficult to postulate a sizeable under-counting of women in Bihar alone, although it is not impossible. The post-enumeration check conducted by the Office of the Registrar General has not shown a significant difference in the net omission rates by gender in the eastern zone, which includes Bihar. The number of households in the sample selected for post-enumeration check was not large enough to make state-level estimates.[6] On the other hand, according to the National Family and Health Survey conducted in Bihar, with a sample of 4748 households, the *de jure* household population had a more balanced sex ratio (1046 males per 1000 females)[7] than was reported by the 1991 census (1098 males per 1000 females), implying that females may have been under-counted in Bihar in 1991. Some press reports suggest a practice of female infanticide in parts of Bihar (specifically in Katihar district), but the subject needs detailed micro-level research.[8]

However, the possibility of under-counting of women in the 1991 census in urban areas and in some parts of the country where a volatile political and social climate prevailed prior to the census, continues to find favour with some scholars, especially in the context of faster increase in life expectancy of women compared to men.[9]

Sex-selective Migration

Besides differential enumeration, the ratio of males to females in a population is also affected by different rates of gains or losses due to migration. Typically, urban areas in India have a more masculine population because men tend to dominate the migration flows to urban areas. For the country as a whole, sex differentials in international migration would be an important determinant of the sex composition of the population. However, relative to the size of India's population, international migration would be an important determinant of the sex composition of the population.

However, relative to the size of India's population, international migration from or to India has been quite small. The small streams of emigration from India have largely been dominated by men, leading to the deficit of men in the population. More men than women have tended from India both to the developed countries and to the oil-rich Gulf countries. The majority of the men migrating to the developed countries are generally joined by women through marriage at a later date. The migrants to the Persian Gulf region have been mostly men because of the opportunities for unskilled and semi-skilled work in the construction industry in the Gulf region. However, not many of the Indians in the Gulf countries seem to aim at absorption and assimilation in the countries where they work, but wish to and do return to the home country, once the contractual obligations are fulfilled.

Sex Ratio at Birth

Besides the difference in sex-specific under-counting, or sex-specific migration, the sex ratio of a population is also a function of the sex ratio at birth and the sex ratio at death. The sex ratio at birth is, however, a biologically or genetically determined phenomenon and ranges from 102 to 107 male births to 100 female births around the world. Unless there is a conscious effort at intervention by human beings, the sex ratio at birth is not going to change even over a fairly long period of time such as a century according to available evidence.

All the same, the early census commissioners in India, who were intrigued by the deficit of women in the Indian population, explored all possible theories to understand the phenomenon. Excess of males at birth was one issue which received attention from them and besides the racial or genetic factor, they considered factors, such as climate, season of gestation, food, or practice of consanguineous marriages or polyandry, which could possibly influence the sex of the child at conception. However, they could not find evidence in support of any of these factors and therefore dismissed them as not having any effect whatsoever on the sex ratio at birth of the Indian population.[10]

After the result of the 1991 census, however, the issue of sex ratio in India becoming more masculine has resurfaced and serious thought was given to the observation that the proportion of boys among live births or the sex ratio at birth has risen in India at least during the 1980s.[11] The reported change is more likely to reflect the effect of some human interventions including some sex-selective reporting, misclassification or female-selective termination of pregnancy. The contribution of the last factor on the sex ratio at birth needs a more careful analysis of data from various sources, such as those available in the Sample registration System, census and birth records from hospitals or institutions. Information about 35,000 births that occurred between 1987 and 1992 in three hospitals in Delhi indicated that the sex ratio at birth went up from 106 in the initial year to 109 in the end year. Whether this reflects a human intervention in the form of some conscious effort to kill female foetuses or normal fluctuations is a moot point because the series is very short and the changes are not dramatic. However, we need more evidence, such as the sex composition of the live births that women already have, to substantiate the effect of sex-selective foeticide on sex ratio at birth.

Female foeticide

The sex ratio at birth can be altered by identifying the sex of the foetus and then destroying the foetus of the unwanted sex. Technology is available in the forms of amniocentesis and chorionic biopsy, which can, through chromosomal analysis, help detect the sex of the foetus. The chorionic biopsy is a relatively simple test and is available through private sources at many places in India. It has also become relatively inexpensive, can be conducted with a pregnancy of about 8 weeks and is considered to be 90% to 95% accurate. As a result, in areas where discrimination against women is quite widespread, the clinics offering this service have mushroomed.

The feminists, activists and many other concerned citizens have from time to time raised an alarm at the trend of aborting female foetuses after the detection. Some have even voiced their concern that it will have, in the long run, a very adverse effect on the sex ratio of the population.[12] However, while raising an alarm against a practice that undermines the value of women in Indian society, the long- and short term effect of sex-selective foeticide on the sex ratio should be examined as a careful empirical exercise. Also, we need more empirical data on the extent of female foeticide, the demographic, socio-economic status of the women who undergo the sex-selective abortion and other factors. It may be argued that many other processes that are at work should bring about positive changes in the status of Indian women so that practices like female foeticide are not resorted to.

Sex ratio of juvenile population

Since the technology of amniocentesis has become available on a large scale in the last 10 years, the sex ratio of the population has been circulated from the 1991 census data from the age group 0–6 and 7+ to understand what is happening at the macro level and whether the data reflect the use of such techniques. The 0–6 sex ratios at the state level as shown in Table 3, present an interesting pattern. (Admittedly, sex ratio is a crude measure to understand the process through which people resort to sex-selective foeticide because the ratio also reflects the traditional measures of discrimination.) The data indicate that in the contiguous area from Kerala extending up to West Bengal, the sex ratio of children aged 0–6 is very similar and ranges between 103 and 104. In Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh it is between 105 and 106.

Table 3
Sex Ratio (Males per 1000 Females) of Population by Age, India and Major States*

	Total			Rural			Urban		
Major States	All Ages	0–6	7+	All ages	0–6	7+	All ages	0–6	7+
India	1079	1060	1084	1065	1054	1068	1119	1069	1128
Andhra Pradesh	1029	1030	1029	1023	1021	1024	1043	1040	1044
Assam	1084	1030	1099	1071	1024	1083	1194	1047	1220
Bihar	1098	1040	1113	1085	1041	1097	1185	1052	1215
Gujarat	1070	1080	1069	1053	1068	1051	1103	1100	1103
Haryana	1156	1140	1160	1157	1140	1162	1152	1131	1156
Himachal Pradesh	1025	1050	1020	1010	1047	1002	1203	1106	1219
Karnataka	1042	1040	1042	1027	1038	1025	1076	1052	1080
Kerala	965	1040	953	964	1044	952	967	1044	957
Madhya Pradesh	1074	1050	1080	1060	1046	1064	1120	1068	1131
Maharashtra	1071	1060	1074	1028	1050	1024	1143	1070	1157
Orissa	1030	1040	1029	1012	1032	1008	1154	1053	1173
Punjab	1134	1140	1132	1127	1139	1124	1152	1154	1152
Rajasthan	1099	1090	1101	1088	1089	1088	1137	1101	1145
Tamil Nadu	1027	1060	1023	1019	1058	1013	1041	1047	1040
Uttar Pradesh	1138	1080	1153	1132	1078	1146	1162	1077	1183
West Bengal	1090	1040	1102	1063	1032	1071	1165	1047	1183

* Excludes Jammu & Kashmir.
Source: Census of India, 1991.

Tamil Nadu is a surprise, because the sex ratio of its total population is much less masculine than that of India, excepting for Kerala. Recently there have been reports from parts of Tamil Nadu and some hard evidence about female infanticide and systematic killing of girl babies.[13] How widespread either the frank form of female infanticide or subtle form of neglecting the girl babies is, cannot be ascertained. There are systematic district-level or state-level data to support or refute the prevalence of such practices.

North of Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh are three major states of Gujarat, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, where the sex ratio of children 0–6 years ranges between 108 and 109. This level of masculinity in sex ratio of children, very likely, reflects the neglect of female children in an open manner. Whether the lowering of the number of female children is achieved through the traditional methods of denying medical care in the event of illness, or through infanticide or through female foeticide is difficult to ascertain. Very likely, in groups that devalue women, people resort to any or all of these methods. It is interesting to note that in Gujarat the sex ratio of 7+ population is less masculine and in Rajasthan the two sex ratios are nearly the same. (In the less masculine sex ratio areas, the sex ratios of 7+ population are higher than that of children.) Uttar Pradesh is an exception to this, in the sense that the sex ratio of 7+ population is higher than that of the juvenile population.

The worst areas of India are the twin states of Punjab and Haryana and the union territory of Delhi. Traditionally, this is also the region with highly masculine sex ratio. But a sex ratio of its child population of around 114 boys to 1000 girls clearly reflects that the tradition of neglecting female children or finishing them off survives, in spite of modernization and economic development. This is also the region where advertisements for sex determination tests and for induced abortions are repeatedly seen even in rural areas and facilities for performing them are readily available. Instead of resorting to traditional ways of killing of girls or neglecting them, it is possible that people are taking advantage of the new technology, which may also be more safe. It is, however, a sad commentary on the status of women in this part of India.

Sex Differentials in Mortality

It has been convincingly demonstrated that the primary factor contributing to the deficit of women in India has been an anomalous excess female mortality. The same feature was evident in the past among the Indian communities abroad and other South Asian countries.[14] In Western Europe, the United States of America and Japan, women experienced lower mortality than men at most ages, and therefore enjoy greater longevity than men. Mortality data from these countries have shown that when the same health care and nutrition are available to children and adults of both sexes, male mortality rates are higher than that of females at all ages.[15] This situation arises because women are considered biologically stronger than men, suffer much less from illnesses and heart ailments, are less prone to accidents and experience much lower mortality arising from alcohol consumption or cigarette smoking. In India, as discussed below, the higher mortality experienced by women from birth almost until the end of their reproductive period has largely contributed to the high masculinity ratio in population, and the discriminatory treatment received by girls and women more than offsets their natural advantage over men.

The evidence for sex differentials in mortality is provided by a comparison of the ratio of the crude death rates of males and females with the ratio of males to females in the population of each state. In the states where the female death rates are especially high relative to the male rates, the male population outnumbers the female population by a rather large margin. This phenomenon has persisted even in recent years, as evident from both the 1981 and 1991 census data. In Punjab and Haryana, for example, high masculinity of population is closely associated with higher mortality of females than that of males. On the other hand, the ratio of male to female mortality is nearly normal in Kerala, where women outnumber men in the population. The persistence of this anomalous situation in India is indicative of the presence of social practices and cultural ethos that undervalues daughters or women. The presence of such traditions is stronger in some states than in others. Among the several practices that adversely affect women's health and lead to deaths, one can list unwillingness to seek health care for young girls or women during illness including at the time of difficult child birth, or seeking care when it is too late. In some parts of the country, female infanticide continues to be openly practiced.

There is sufficient evidence from a carefully monitored prospective study undertaken in 11 villages in Khanna tehsil of Punjab that female mortality was lower than male mortality in the first five or six months after birth when the babies are breast fed. Once supplementation begins, female death rates stride ahead of that of males.[16] This may arise from not providing enough nutrition to girls and/or not providing timely health care to them in the event of illness. In a prospective study undertaken almost three decades after the Khanna study had been conducted, in rural areas of Gujarat, where children under five years of age were weighed every month for three years, and where all deaths were closely monitored and the causes ascertained, there was no evidence of discrimination in provision of nutrition to boys and girls. What was, however, striking was that among the terminally ill children, girls tended to be treated with home remedies in the initial few days and were taken to a health facility only when their condition worsened. Boys, on the other hand, were rushed to the health care facility almost immediately after an illness was noticed.[17] In the period of thirty years the practices had not changed, girls continued to be undervalued compared to the boys.

Another dimension of the neglect of providing care to girls is brought out by a more recent study in the same 11 villages from the Khanna tehsil. The death rate among girls under five years of age who had an older sister, as opposed to those who did not, was nearly 50% higher than among boys.[18] This is indicative of the fact that the neglect of second or higher order female children is behavioural in nature and is wilful. The second and subsequent are not wanted by the Kallars of Madurai district in Tamil Nadu also, who sometimes resort to poisoning their second-born or higher order daughters.[19]

The other side of the neglect of female children or of excess of mortality of females is the preference for male children. There is considerable evidence of son preference in India, particularly in the northern region.[20] The data collected by the national Family Health Survey also confirmed the existence of a strong son preference. Overall, the respondents' preferred family size consists of 1.6 sons, 1.1 daughters and 0.2 children of either sex.[21] In most micro-level surveys, on the one hand, the attitudinal questions on the subject have indicated that the ideal sex composition of children desired by couples is two boys and one girl. The practice of female foeticide is clearly linked to the son preference.

It is sometimes argued that the success of India's family welfare programme, and the decline in fertility would help improve the sex ratio. However, it is a moot point and needs to be explored with more research. Success in family planning programme or decline in fertility is indicative that parents are having fewer children. However, without being able to influence the son preference or being able to control the techniques by which couples can achieve the children of their choice, the modern measures, which are designed to help couples to have healthy children, can only accentuate the deficit of women.[22]

CONCLUSION

The evidence presented in this paper indicates that the major factor explaining the deficit of women in India continues to be their excess mortality. True, life expectancy at birth has increased at a faster rate for females than for males, implying that women have gained in real terms from health care. However, compared to many developed countries where female life expectancy is 6 to 8 years higher than that of males, in India we have only recently reached a stage where the life expectancy of females has just about edged above that of males. (According to the Life Tables prepared on the basis of the Sample registration data for the period 1989–1993, expectancy of life at birth for males and females was 59.0 and 59.7 years, respectively.) This improvement even extended into Punjab and Haryana, where excess female mortality was particularly marked in the past. Also, female life expectancy exceeded that of males in urban areas throughout India.[23]

The modest gain achieved in female life expectancy in recent years cannot wipe out the overall deficit of women, which is a cumulative process of neglect of women over several decades. Nationwide, female deaths still exceeded the male death rates at every age from infancy through age 34 in 1991. This pattern was reversed for Indian women aged 35 and over. While maternal mortality is still relatively high in India and does contribute to the deficit of women, excess mortality among young girls in the ages one to four accounts for a much greater share of the deficit. As indicated earlier, baby girls often receive much less health care and attention from their parents than do boys. In families living in or close to poverty, this neglect can have dire consequences. Girls are more likely than boys to become ill and die during childhood, as reflected in their higher childhood mortality rates.

After the 1991 census results were published, a widespread concern was voiced by women's groups and others about the worsening sex ratio of the Indian population. One of the measures initiated by women's groups was to urge the government to ban the sex determination tests for detection of the sex of the foetus. The government succeeded in banning the use of sex determination tests for purposes other than the detection of genetic abnormalities, which can be conducted only in approved institutions. In 1994 the Indian parliament passed the Pre-Natal Sex Determination Technique

(Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Bill. However, without the co-operation of medical personnel, implementation of such legislation has proved a most difficult task. The extent to which sex ratio at birth is being altered through human intervention, however, needs to be carefully studied.

A more long-lasting, although less immediate, solution would be to attack the reasons why parents want to avoid having girls or why they have a preference for sons. Admittedly, the neglect of female children occurs at the household level and it is very difficult to employ any measures to directly influence the behaviour of the members of the household. Preference for sons, for example, cannot be removed easily from the mindset of people. Only indirect measures such as providing widespread education to all children, designing a curriculum that is gender-sensitive emphasizing the worth of daughters or women in the family and society and spreading these messages in innovative ways through mass media, can enhance the status of women in Indian society.

NOTES

Note: I had requested Pravin Visaria to write on this theme and he had agreed. After his sudden death, I decided to reprint Leela Visaria's paper published in my co-edited volume *From Independence Towards Freedom: Indian Women since 1947:* OUP, 1999. We are grateful to The Oxford University Press for permission to reproduce the piece with an altered title. The data in the paper are based on 1991 census, but the arguments are valid even in 2005. The title of the paper and the format of references have been slightly altered to suit the purpose of this volume. I am grateful to OUP for permission to reprint with these modifications. Editor.

1. According to the 2001 Census the ratio is 973 women per 1000 men. Editor.
2. See A.J. Coale, 'Excess of Female Mortality and the Balance of the Sexes in the Population: An Estimate of the Number of Missing Females', *Population and Development Review,* 17:3, 1991.
3. Census of India, 1971, Census Centenary Monograph, No. 6.
4. Census of India, 1972, p. 40.
5. Pravin Visaria, The Sex Ratio of the Population of India, Monograph No. 10, Office of the Registrar General, Government of India, New Delhi, 1972.
6. Census of India, 1991, p. 9.
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CHAPTER 6

Imagined Lovers: Ideology, Practice and Social Hierarchies

Prem Chowdhry

The oral tradition of women of rural north India throws up an alternative viewpoint of their sexuality that stands in sharp contrast to the dominant male view with its ideal image of the chaste woman. This essay explores the construction of lustful woman as it emerges out of women's songs produced collectively by women, sung by women for an audience consisting purely of women. It seeks to understand how and why this 'lustful' image, common to the songs of both men and women, has different connotations and messages; how far it is consistent with women's self-understanding and self-evaluation, desires and fantasies; and how far it relates to their life experiences. The construction of meaning around this image is explored in the social context of power relations and status considerations existing within the family, caste and class. The paper seeks to understand how far the subversiveness of these songs finds its echo in the actual transgressive behaviour of women in caste/gender relationships and with what effects. It highlights the feminine construction of masculinity, conjugality, pleasure and deprivation that cuts across several societal hierarchies. The inevitable conflict within a world-view where different and contradictory beliefs and desires coexist brings to the fore the interface between ideology and practice.

The image of the lustful woman, whose sexuality is dangerous, is one of the more popular image projections in rural folk culture. This image forms an important aspect of male visualisation of women. In this article I shall be exploring this image in rural north India, with special insights drawn from the Haryana region. Here I wish to clarify that I have picked up just one of the images out of the many that exist, showing a perceptible difference of opinion and perception within a world-view otherwise shared by both men and women. There are other images that overlap, reinforce and echo the 'other' in remarkable ways. As such these songs constitute a small part, however significant, within the sexual field itself.

Although research in the field of sexuality in India is of recent origin, it has attracted a great deal of scholarly scrutiny.[1] One of the dominant images of women that has survived through history is that of the chaste woman/wife. This ideal has held a commanding position from the time it was inscribed in Brahmanical Hindu texts until contemporary times. It continues to gain in popularity, particularly in popular cultural forms, which project this image as quintessentially that of an 'Indian woman' and as an intrinsic part of Indian culture. Contested by women themselves it has not been universally accepted across various regions in India.[2] This article focuses on the antithetical image of a lustful woman as it emerges out of women's songs. Reserved for private entertainment only, these songs are different in their ideological content, representation and imagery from the songs sung by men. Men's songs, seldom a collective effort, are known to be composed by individuals and form a part of public entertainment for a dominantly male audience. They are mostly sung either at an informal open air male gathering around a fire or while smoking the *Hukka* (water pipe), or in an elaborate dramatic production as in folk theatre. The image of lustful women, common to both men and women's songs, has different connotations and messages in each group of songs. The construction of meaning around this image is located in the social context in which women find themselves. In the same social milieu, women's songs have a different context, purpose and nature than men's songs.

This context, crucial to the understanding of the image, has not been fruitfully explored even in the recent works of those anthropologists who have made a significant contribution to the recognition of the importance of women's songs.[3] These works have initiated a much needed corrective to the western view of Indian women as submissive and passive, as well as that of British rulers and the nationalists who, for reasons of their own, projected women as essentially tradition-bound.[4] In writing about women's songs anthropologists have emphasised discourse and language to indicate the subversive nature of these songs and the challenge they pose to the dominant discourse. This discourse is set essentially within the family and there is no attempt to contextualise these songs in the wider social milieu. Consequently, the songs emerge as a sort of celebration of women's subversive power, so that in place of women's repression/victimhood we have a display of women's power and sexual agency, a sort of natural feminism. The present work goes beyond the familial to explore areas of caste and class. It investigates how far the subversiveness of these songs finds its echo in the actual transgressive behaviour of women in caste/gender relationships.

Many of the songs that I have selected for analysis were collected during my field work in Haryana in the late 1980s and some in the mid-1990s and more recently in the new millennium. They form a part of my ongoing research on understanding colonial and contemporary society of Haryana. These songs are largely drawn from the landowning dominant class/caste women, a number of them Jat by caste, and offer a comment on the class/caste configuration which exists today. Similar songs like the ones that I have selected are known to be popularly sung by high caste women of Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh as well. In fact it is likely that such songs are the common property of women of upper caste groups in the entire northern belt of rural India. Women's songs, a significant part of oral tradition and popular culture in India, form an entire sub-culture for women in this vast region.

The dating of these songs remains problematic. They certainly enjoy contemporary usage, but not necessarily contemporary authorship. In people's memories their roots go back to much earlier days, possibly to pre-colonial and certainly the colonial period.

In the nineteenth century a reference to these songs was made in several works of the British administrators.[5] By the 1920s and the 1930s of the twentieth century a large number of *Raginis* and *Sangs* came to be published.[6] Some of these, as I argue below, were drawn from exclusive women's songs, but with a difference. The older generation of women in Haryana belonging to the age group of 70 and 80 remember and sing these songs which they claim were passed on to them by their grandmothers and great-grand mothers. No doubt, many of these songs have undergone some changes, due to deletions and additions made over the years, and new songs have been coined by successive generations to add to the earlier repertoire of songs. However, it is not possible to pick out these changes with any degree of certainty or accuracy. Also, the customary practice in Haryana of marrying daughters as far as possible from the natal village has widened this repertoire as well as given expansive currency to these songs. For instance, my grandmother (a Jatni) who came from a village close to Ambala district bordering on current Punjab and my great-grand mother (a Brahmini and a *Karewa* woman) who hailed from a village located on the borders of Rajasthan, brought back their own collection of songs which they added to the ones existing in the place of their marriage. This greatly added to the existing repertoire of songs. My mother, like many other women, consequently inherited a greatly enriched heritage of songs to draw upon. In most places women's songs are drawn from various corners of the province and a variety of caste groups as well as across the provincial borders and show a mixture of dialects. These songs enjoy huge currency all over Haryana but necessarily defy dating.

Although parts of this vibrant oral tradition have been published, they remain fragmented and inadequate. Yet, even these fragments are able to express the wealth of this sub-culture which survives within the fold of a male-dominated hegemonic culture and offers a resistance and challenge to it. Although locally and regionally devalued by the dominant male viewpoint, these offer a perspective on society which has its sympathisers among some men in the lower as well as in the upper caste groups. This is not to say that women do not share or submit to the dominant ideology. They do. But they also blatantly mock the dominant social and behavioural norms by articulating an alternative viewpoint. These articulations can be seen to work at the level of perception, idealisation and fantasy which more often than not provide a cathartic space. Yet, from the male point of view, these are threatening; particularly in the likely case of women assuming or seeking to assume direct agency by giving shape to such articulations. The inevitable conflict within a world-view where different and contradictory beliefs and desires coexist brings to the fore the interface between ideology and practice. The subversiveness of the songs results in societal attempts to impose curbs and controls and their assumed or real correlation with transgression of caste/gender boundaries leads to the infliction of direct violence on the protagonists.

I

LUSTFULNESS: DIFFERING PERCEPTIONS

In rural north India, as recent research has shown, *swangs* or *sangs*, and *nautanki* (folk-dramas of north India), as well as much of the dialogues sung in verses called *raginis*, present differing images of women.[7] These folk dramas are an exclusive male domain: from creation to performance and viewership. Many of these project the ideal image of a wife or a mother, as also that of the lustful woman, whose actions contravene these ideal projections. The latter image is replicated in various popular sayings, proverbs, riddles, jokes and folktales. Their negative connotations act as an instrument of control over women as well as a warning to the male populace regarding such sexually dangerous women. The male repertoire of songs is bawdy, comical and entertaining at one level, yet, deeply conservative and 'idealistic' in the messages and images they convey, warning of the dangers of female sexuality. Such depictions not only engender male titillation but also act as a cautionary tale that warns and teaches. The destructive violence that such female desire unleashes turns against the women themselves and they die untimely and often gruesome deaths. Women are sternly warned against following this path.

Women's songs, on the other hand, accept their lustful nature as natural and initiate sexual encounters and seek fulfilment. These songs are authored collectively by women and sung and performed exclusively by women for women. Occupying an almost autonomous space outside the male presence, most of them are not to be heard or viewed by men. Yet often they are sung addressing the men and in close proximity to them. The lurking presence of men in the periphery is not obvious or acknowledged by either of them. Men have full knowledge of these songs, having heard them from their childhood. Male children (like female children), along with their mothers, form part of the audience of this exclusive gathering. This ambiguity in relationship to the male presence, or rather absence, opens out the exclusiveness of a private space into a more public one. This private-public space allows a full and frank expression of women's desires and I would venture to suggest perhaps affords them greater pleasure. The coming together of the private and the public space also allows for a public contestation or denunciation of an essentially private activity, as we shall see presently.

The rural north has a vast repertoire of such exclusively women's songs. A large body of them are sung on festive occasions like Holi or Teej and special occasions like weddings, births or deaths as well as on numerous other ritual occasions. These songs are sung usually very late in the evenings in the courtyards where men are barred. Although there are special songs identified strongly with special occasions, many of them are sung on multiple occasions and may be called all purpose songs. Barring the special songs, just any song is likely to be picked up by women while doing chores like fetching water from the village well, grinding grain, applying cowdung and mud mix on the floors and walls or making cowdung cakes. There are also private women's songs/dance/drama/skit performances called *khoria* and *loor*. On the occasion of marriage in rural Haryana (and other parts of north India) it is customary practice for an all male *barat* (bridegroom's party) to set off for the bride's house for the wedding. At such times, women have the exclusive possession of the home space to enact the entire sequence *of khoria* at night while the men are away. In *khoria* (a word significantly derived from *kholna* 'to open,' or 'to expose'), women go through a mock circuit of courtship, marriage, consummation of marriage and childbirth. A mature married woman generally takes up the role of the bride to initiate the younger woman masquerading as a shy bridegroom into sexual pleasure accompanied with appropriate and explicit songs. The bride is shown as being interested in knowing whether her husband is sexually virile. *Khoria* plays out the social anxieties that exist among women in rural areas regarding the proper consummation of marriage and fertility, which sociologists have talked about.[8]

The woman in these songs is acknowledged as 'lustful.' This lustfulness, initiative and sexual aggressiveness, however, are directed towards her husband – legitimate, and well within the ambit of social expectation of motherhood and of producing a legitimate heir. There are indeed a vast number of women's songs expressing a wife's desire for her husband, which are widespread across castes and classes and are sung on different occasions. Such songs form a very substantial part of the songs of separation called *biraha or bidesia geet* of this region and also that of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Rajasthan.[9] They can be traced back to the pre-colonial period (fifth century), and came to be widely published as *bara-masa* (songs that can be sung through the year) in the 1870s from different places, mostly Delhi and its environs. The emphasis of the songs is '*piya bin Radha*' (Radha without her beloved). Interestingly, Radha and Krishna are accepted as a married couple in Haryana, although the Radha–Krishna symbolism has been somewhat blurred over the years. Instead the songs today reflect a more direct approach of a *lugai* (woman) for her *bhartar* (husband). The *biraha* songs are generally erotic and evoke an imagery of intense physical longing.

In the colonial period the social context of *biraha* songs is located in the large-scale out-migration of men from this region. Men from different class/caste groups moved from this dry region to more prosperous regions of Punjab, especially to the canal colonies, as owners, tenants and agricultural labour.[10] The emigration factor was greatly compounded by the vast recruitment to the British Indian army.[11] In the post-colonial period, too, the demand for recruitment in Haryana has remained high.[12] In combination with the desire among the rural male populace belonging to different social categories to move out of the villages in pursuit of jobs, this has meant that a large number of men move to urban areas while the women stay on in the villages.[13] Because of the large-scale migration of men that this region continues to experience, the *biraha* songs have remained very popular.

The *biraha* songs, however, deal with a husband who is absent not merely in a physical sense but also in an emotional and psychological sense. The conjugal bond as a dominant norm tends to be played down in rural areas where the togetherness of conjugal couples is not really socially accepted. The bonds of sexuality are not explicitly recognised at the social level, where the wife is ignored and hardly any conversation is exchanged with her in public. A wife observes *ghunghat* (veil) in the presence of her husband and others. Social norms do not deny the importance of sexual bonds but relegate them to the backstage that is hidden from public view. In a highly structured rural society, this puts the wife-husband relationship under a great deal of stress. Constant surveillance and monitoring by older women leaves young wives, still unsettled in their conjugal homes, vulnerable, and under great pressure.

These songs born out of a commonly shared experience and mutual sympathy, offer a much needed space to women – a space which is tightly controlled, if not denied to her in real life. Here I cite only two songs, as representative of a vast repertoire of such songs, which show a wife as longing/lusting for her husband, absent or just elusive:

laye chale the bhanwar ho pipli, hanji koi ho gaee
ghani chhayen, baithain ki rut chale naukri
chod chale the bhanwar ho bachhari, hanji koi ho gaee
lagar gae, duhan ki rut chale naukri
panch baras ki bhanwar ho biyahi, hanji koi ho gaee
ser juan, ghalan ki rut chale naukri

(The tender sapling has grown into a shady tree,
It is time to rest, beloved, but you are off to work.
The young heifer has grown into a cow,
It is time for milking, beloved, but you are off to work.
The five-year old bride had grown into a young woman,
It is time for loving, beloved, but you are off to work.)

Another song of the same kind goes as follows:

jis din se sajan chaal pade
manne talon ka nahaana chhoda
meri yaani so umar, sajan ne aana chhoda
jis din se sajan chaal pade
manne rasoi ka janna chhoda
meri yaani so umar, sajan ne aana chhoda
jis din se sajan chaal pade
manne phulka ka khanna chhoda
meri yaani so umar, sajan ne aana chhoda
jis din se sajan chaal pade
manne mahlan ka janna chhoda
meri yaani so umar, sajan ne aana chhoda
jis din se sajan chaal pade
manne sejan ka sonna chhoda
meri yaani so umar, sajan ne aana chhoda
jis din se sajan chaal pade
meri yanni si umar, manne sajan ne chhoda.

(The day you left, my husband,
at my tender age,
I ceased to bathe.
The day you left, my husband,
at my tender age,
I ceased to cook.
The day you left, my husband,
at my tender age,
I ceased to eat.
The day you left, my husband,

at my tender age,
I ceased to walk about.
The day you left, my husband,
at my tender age,
I ceased to sleep on the bed.
The day you left, my husband,
I was of tender age.)

The lustful woman operating legitimately within the conjugal relationship has no existence in men's songs. Rather, male construction of the lustful woman is essentially a corrupting/corrupted one. She is viewed in relation to her lovers, that is, other than the legitimate husband. In male projections this lustful category includes not only a deceitful wife but also an incestuous mother. For example, all over north India one of the more popular themes for *sang, nautanki* and *ragini* has been the image of a young lustful stepmother, married to an old man, coveting her youthful stepson, close to her in age.[14] Her attempts to seduce him form some of the most erotic passages of these songs. The son rejects her overtures. The woman in revenge accuses him of attempted sexual assault. The father punishes him severely. The son is later discovered to be innocent accidentally or providentially, and the woman is either punished by the husband or forgiven by the son. Some notable themes of this are to be found in the *sang* performance of *Rup Basant, Puran Mal or Puran Bhagat* and *Bhartihari*. The 'mother' who is depicted with a covetous sexuality is thus symbolically downgraded. This motif is replicated in folktales, proverbs and other local sayings leaving no doubt about the incestuous desires of a lustful mother who is ready to seduce her stepson.

There are other relationships which fall into this incestuous transgressive mother-son relationship category. For instance: *mausi-bhanja, mami-bhanja, chachi-bhatija* – all liaisons between aunts and nephews. Another such relationship is that of *bhabhi-devar* (sister-in-law and younger brother-in-law). In *bhabhi-devar sang* a *bhabhi* is made to stand in a relationship similar to that of a mother (to her *devar*). However, a *devar* in Haryana-Punjab is popularly acknowledged as a potential husband. In view of the traditional sanction and the growing widespread acceptance of levirate in this region among most caste categories, it is not surprising that there are a vast number of jokes and songs about the amorous relationship of the two.[15] It may be noted that such a portrayal is not entirely new. In several versions of the play '*Nautanki Shahzadi*' (from where the name of *Nautanki* theatre of north India is derived), the lustfulness of the covetous *bhabhi* desiring her *devar*, who repulses her advances, is used as the beginning of the adventurous/romantic tale.[16] This contradiction notwithstanding, the equation of *devar-bhabhi* with other prohibitory categories of relationships works towards a new morality, in keeping with the growing emphasis upon chastity for women. The traditional sanction of levirate stands denounced to indict the *bhabhi*. It is the *bhabhi's* lustful nature which leads to the symbolic castration (*moonch katva di*) of the *devar*. This is a significant attempt to articulate a different tradition in the folk songs which is at odds with ground reality. From this point of view, it may well be a more recent insertion attempting to reclaim tradition, but in fact inventing new ones.

The relationship of a woman with her *jeth* (older brother-in-law) has always been problematic, as he occupies the status of a father-in-law. Yet, the remarriage of a widow with her *jeth* is not entirely unknown in this region.[17] The men's songs used for enacting *sang* describes the *jeth* making sexual advances to his sister-in-law. The song goes as follows:

Jeth: chandarma si shan dekh pari mein tere mahal me agya
Bahu: bapa barga jeth jale kayun karan ughai lagya
Jeth: bhai mera pardes gaya din kate kis ke sahare
Bahu: panch saat din me ajya jale matna boli mare
Jeth: tu mewa ki paki dali main khalun ban subare
Bahu: matna chonch lagaiye papi bhar rakhaya zahar chhuhare
Jeth: ashik banda masukon ke phal tor tor ke khagya
Bahu: jis ne chedi beer birani, turant natija pagya
Jeth: mere kamre me chale ne gori tu batwa si
Bahu: sou marungi joot oot ke ker raha badmasi
Jeth: joot maar chahe paag taar le chahe tudwade phansi
Bahu: kali nagan beer parai matna samjhe hansi

Jeth: I am drawn to your house by your moonlike beauty
Bahu: Such advances don't become you, for you are like my father.
Jeth: My brother is away, how do you spend your days?
Bahu: He'll be back soon enough, rascal, don't you dare covet me.
Jeth: You are a bunch of luscious fruit, let me taste of you.
Bahu: Keep away you sinner, this fruit is full of poison.
Jeth: A fruit is meant to be eaten, a beloved is meant to be possessed.
Bahu: One who seduces another's wife gets the punishment at once.
Jeth: Come to my room, my fair one, be mine.
Bahu: With a shoe I'll beat you up, you scoundrel.
Jeth: Beat me or humiliate me or hang me, if you like.
Bahu: Another's wife is a deadly viper, don't trifle with her.

I was informed that this song was originally a part of women's song which was appropriated by the male writers for purposes of *sang* composition,[18] undoubtedly with some changes. I was unable to find precisely such a song from the repertoire of women's songs that I came across. Yet, I could gather a large number of women's sayings which roundly condemn any such association with the *jeth*. There is some evidence to suggest that the *sang* writers have indeed appropriated a great deal from the exclusive women's songs. This is a significant aspect which I propose to explore elsewhere. The current exploitation of women's songs with their erotic imagery by the music industry to stir up the libido of its male audience (now flooding the rural north Indian market), has been noted by the media.[19] Played in all male gatherings, in rural market places, around winter fire gatherings or even in the village *chaupals* (village assembly halls), all out of bounds for women, this area with rich research potential awaits scholarly investigation. It may be safe to conclude here that male appropriation of certain songs of women for purposes of *sang* performance perhaps indicates the need for the dominant ideology to argue against other competing ideologies in order to legitimise itself.[20] In this case it is not known what the original song was and how and when it was appropriated.

The catalytic factor in the above song is the missing migratory husband and the original song may well have been part of the *biraha* repertoire. The male rendition in *sang* ignores the longing of the wife for her absent husband and concentrates on the lustful designs of the *jeth*. The ardent wooing and the exposure of male desire, though thwarted by his own sister-in-law, is meant clearly to titillate the male audience. Yet, at the same time it shows an almost seductive wooing by the *jeth* in a social milieu which sanctions such alliances. The high moral tone of the sister-in-law becomes more in keeping with the concept of chastity and monogamy which is belied by the ideological and actual reality, but may well portray her innermost feelings as in some other songs of women. The double voice which comes across in the song assumes importance as it projects two attitudes with a touch of irony at the expense of both. Yet, in a curious way it does underline the woman's protest, her self-assertion and attempt to establish her self-esteem, identity and ability to say 'no' even within the given norms.

It is also interesting to note that in this version of the above song (as also in the *biraha* songs) the woman is married to a man who may perhaps be close to her in age. In the general male rendition of the lustful woman two things stand out. One, the woman is almost invariably married to an old man. Second, she does not have an offspring of her own. This certainly suggests that at a certain level, while portraying women's lustfulness these male renderings deplore unequal matches. Yet, they fall short of offering them as justifications or providing a sympathetic understanding of female desires. As grounds for making the lustful overtures, the first factor (i.e. the age difference) is used essentially for titillation and ridicule. The second issue is ignored, the presumption being that she should accept her childlessness or be satisfied with her stepchild/children. The advice rendered is compliance and chastity for the woman and infliction of gruesome punishment on her for being lustful.

Women's songs on the other hand condemn the unequal match in no uncertain terms. The two popularly abhorred images they evoke of such a husband are that of an old man or a child. In both instances it may well signify a lack of virility or impotence in a husband, comparable to that of an old man or a child, which is deplored. This condemnation carries the dominant theme of sexual frustration and non-fulfilment, and is crucially related to a woman's transgression. It suggests grounds for understanding a physical and social need/condition rather than pass moral judgements. One of the songs maintains:

mere maat pita ke keede padiyo
main booddhe ke sang bihadi
mera choor choor kar diya noor
main bilkul moas bittha di

(May vermin eat my parents
For marrying me to a dotard

My youth has been trampled upon
I have been squeezed totally dry.)

Other songs bemoan a husband too young to satisfy her:

bin milti jott milaai
mariyo maat-pitaa anyaee
des biraan baalam yaanaa
jaane na saar hamari
oont ke gal mein boont bandh diya
khari-khari-khari
mariyo maat-pitaa anyaee
saabat roti ke budak bhare tha khel rahaya giliyare
roti khosi pille ne woh khadya khadya kilkare

(For this unsuitable marriage
May my cruel parents perish
A desolate land, a child for a husband
What need does he have of a wife
A sapling tied to a camel's neck
Oh! What a marriage
May my cruel parents perish.
He plays in the yard with bread in his hand
And giggles when a dog snatches it away.)

Yet another vastly popular song states:

dhundha dhundha ri baignia se chhota
pani ko jayun mere sath sath jave
rove rove ri yeh to neju pakar kai
rovo mut bale sainyan jhiko mut bale sainyan
dungi dungi ji thumhe phuliyan mangai kai
sone ko jaun, mere sath sath jave
rove rove ri amma amma ker kai
rovo mut bale sainyan jhiko mut bale sainyan
dungi dungi ji gudiya mangaye kai.

(I am married to a mere child,
He follows me when I go to fetch water.
Crying and clinging he follows.
Cry not my little beloved,
don't be vexed my little beloved,
I'll get you sweets to eat.
He follows me when I go to sleep.

Mother, mother, he cries,
Don't cry, my little beloved,
don't be vexed my little beloved,
I'll get you a doll to play with.)

In reality the unequal match of a young woman married to an old man or even a child continues to exist. The former does not need elaboration as factors operating behind such marriages may be easily visualised but the latter needs to be understood. In the colonial period several instances exist where a grown-up girl was married to a mere infant or to a pre-pubertal boy. The importance of a woman and her 'work qualities' in the agrarian economy of this region had meant disregarding the girl's age and height in relation to the groom. The age of the bride was frequently determined by the labour requirements of a family. In fact virtue was made of such unequal matches.[21] Yet, this vast difference in age also became a source of trouble for all. The British administrator E. Joseph, recording the customary law of Rohtak district in 1910, observed: 'In point of fact the girl is often older than the boy. This is not an infrequent source of trouble that comes to the courts'.[22] The labour and sexual exploitation of such a girl by males of the family including the father-in-law resulted in the reluctance of the wife to return to her marital home and minor husband. In the colonial period a large number of court cases were moved by the father-in-law on behalf of the minor son asking to be awarded custody of the daughter-in-law on the basis of restitution of conjugal rights.[23]

The practice of marrying older women to minors has continued into the present day, particularly in *karewa* (levirate) alliances.[24] I have dealt elsewhere with the historical factors behind the existence of *karewa* as a social practice and the reasons for its continuation and strengthening in the contemporary period.[25] Regarding such 'unequal matches' Lt. General B.T. Pandit, who served as Corps Commander of Punjab (1989–90), recounted to me how a thirty year old widow had come to him with an appeal to stop her forcible remarriage to her fourteen-year-old brother-in-law. In this instance he recalled having put pressure upon the *panchayat* (village council) to withhold this marriage by threatening action since a minor was involved. But he commented that the village and family elders generally had their way. His observation was that it was a fairly widespread practice. Similar instances are known, associated with the payment of pension as well as compensation to the widows of the 1984 riots in Delhi (in the aftermath of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's assassination) when forcible remarriages of widows to their brothers-in-law, some of them aged 13-14 years have been recorded.[26] Veena Das's study also discloses how, after the India-Pakistan war of 1971, many widows from Punjab were forced to stay on with their parents-in-law till their husbands' younger brothers reached a marriageable age.[27]

The condemnation of unequal marriages, brought about for whatever reasons, crucially connects a woman's lustfulness with the concept of motherhood. It is the lustfulness of not only an unfulfilled wife whose lust is enhanced due to enforced celibacy and non-consummation of marriage, but also by her childlessness, rendering her powerless in the family. It may be pointed out that the folk songs, whether men's or women's, celebrate motherhood with special emphasis on begetting a son. A woman's very acceptance in her conjugal home is at stake; because a bride is not really accepted as a part of the new family till she has produced a son. In her older years, it is her son who gets her status and power, especially over her daughter-in-law. In the absence of a child, rural society puts the blame on a woman for her infertility. Inability to produce, specially a son, also opens up the prospect of her husband's remarriage. In polygamous situations the male voice comments upon the 'unhappiness' of a polygamous man and the female voice comments upon the misery of co-wives.[28] In a region where *banjh* (barrenness) is an abuse and a symbol of inauspiciousness, women's sexuality/lustfulness demands a new focus and a different yardstick of understanding, denied in male projections.

II

COVETING THE MARGINALISED: CROSS-CASTE DESIRES

Women's visualisation of a lover therefore has to be located in the above context. In fact, a crucial difference between men's and women's songs lies in the identification of the lovers of the lustful woman. Men's songs portray the lovers well within the caste/clan/ family/ kinship group.[29] In women's songs the significant image (apart from the *devar*) is that of the 'out-caste' lover. She covets the marginalised, the ascetic (*sadhu, modha, faquir, yogi*), the artisan and the craftsman (*teli, lohar, tarkhan, chippi, chimba, kumhar, darzi, bhatihara, maali, dhobi, manihara*), the folk singer and the performer (*nat, dom, sangi, bhand, sapera*). These categories of caste and profession occur repeatedly in the songs. The only high-caste name that I came across was that of the Bania[30] and I shall comment shortly upon the importance of this exception.

A song closely identified with the month of *Phagun* and the Holi festival, popularly sung by daughters on their visit to their natal home, shows the singer coveting a *modha.* Interestingly, this song and all the other songs cited above and below are sung from the point of view of a married woman and not an unmarried one. Yet, married women alone do not sing these songs; both the married and unmarried join together while singing. The song goes as follows:

man dhakani lai kai main aagy nai gaee
e man babba ne dhoona ramaya, meri maee
e man akek man main meree eesee eesee aai
man holuen modhen ke saath meri maee.

(I went out in search of a flame, O my mother
The sadhu contemplated by the fire, O my mother
He set my heart aflame, O my mother
I want to run off with him, O my mother.)

Modha may be substituted with *sadhu, peer, faquir.* The characterisation by women of the ascetic as lover goes back to its importance as a motif associated with Hindu and Sufi saintly traditions.

Indeed, the dominant popular religion of this region operated through the Sufi shrines, shared by both Hindus and Muslims.[31] Patronised mostly by women of varied class/caste groups, the majority of these shrines have been known to grant boons to devotees, especially women. Many of these shrines were looked after by *faquirs* or *sadhus* who were generally considered 'men of low castes' who had 'no definite creed or rules of life'.[32] Materially poor, they still had the power to remove the barrenness of childless women. *Faquirs*, known to practice continence, are considered more virile than the others and the region is replete with stories of *faquirs/sadhus/* holy men magically curing the barrenness of women. This in a way acknowledges the impotence of the husband or his class/caste men and underlines the virility and potency of men occupying the margins, but for whom some women might have remained barren.

The search for virility came to include members of other low caste groups, socially despised, exploited and denigrated in this region, and women's songs show an open preference and desire for low caste men. A song about a *sapera* or snake charmer (replaceable with other low caste names) takes the form of a conversation between a *sapera* and a woman. Essentially a song (to which women danced) identified with the month of Phagun (March) and Holi, it involves two women as major participants, with others joining the singing. It retains its popularity among women for use on just any occasion for revelry and fun.

sapelle been bajaa de ho chaalungi tere sath.
mehlan mein rhan waali re tanne jhunpari laage udaas.
jhunpari mein gujar karungi re, ho chaalungi tere sath.
halve kai khaan aali re tenne tukre laagen udaas.
tukron mein gujar karungi re, ho chaalungi tere sath.
doodhan ke peen aali re, tenne raabari laage udaas.
raabari mein gujar karungi re, ho chaalungi tere sath.
palgaan pai soan aali re, tenne goodar laage udaas.
goodar mein gujar karungi re, ho chaalungi tere sath.
sapelle been bajaa de ho chaalungi tere sath.

(Play the *been,* O snake-charmer, I'll come along with you.
You dwell in a palace, how will you stay in my thatched hut?
I'll make do with your thatched hut, beloved, I'll come along with you.
You are used to fine dishes, how will you eat my dry crusts?
I'll make do with your dry crusts, beloved, I'll come along with you.
You are used to drinking milk, how will you live on my plain gruel?
I'll make do with your plain gruel, beloved, I'll come along with you.
You are used to a fine bed, how will you sleep on my old rags?
I'll make do with your old rags, beloved, I'll come along with you.
Play the *been,* O snake-charmer, I'll come along with you.)

Another folk song regarding a *nat* (acrobat) brings certain dimensions even more clearly to the forefront. The song (to which also women danced like the previous one) is enacted as a dialogue between a *bhabhi* and *nanad* (sister-in-law):

nat ko khele baalure rate haath
karulaa kaanaa gokhru ji raaj
dekho bai ji natkaa ko roop
thara beera se do til aaglo ji raaj
jaao bhabhi nat kaa ki saath
mhara beera ne parnaadayaan doosari ji raaj
parnaao bai ji do e chaar
hum sarkhi kal no meleu ji raaj
mhara beera chatur sujaan
tum sareekhi ghadle khatth ki ji raaj
ghad lo bai ji do char
mukhare na bole kaya khatth ki ji raaj.

(The acrobat is performing,
with sand glistening in his hands
His earrings twinkle in the sun
Look sister-in-law, how handsome he is
Much more alluring than your brother.
Go *bhabhi* with the acrobat
We'll find another wife for my brother.
Wives you may get two or four
But none like me I am sure.
My brother is a clever man
In wood he can carve one like you.
Let him carve two or four
He can neither speak nor make love.)

Another popular song associated with the festival of Holi and Teej is:

mere gore badan pai rang barse
he ri baagaan me jaaun to maali lalche
mere gore badan pai rang barse
he ri taalaan pai jaaun to dhobi lalche
mere gore badan pai rang barse
he ri sej pai jaaun to balmaa lalche
mere gore badan pai rang barse

(My fair body is aglow, my friend
When I go to the garden, the gardener covets me
My fair body is aglow, my friend
When I go to the pond, the washerman covets me
My fair body is aglow, my friend
When I go to bed, my husband covets me
My fair body is aglow, my friend.)

In coveting lovers from among groups in the margins of society certain important facets stand out, because not all of them are caste groups. One, they are all specialists in their respective fields, masters of a craft or art whether it is stitching clothes, printing textiles, making and selling bangles, making pottery or iron tools, carpentry or oil extraction. Two, these are crafts with which women's activities and needs are closely associated, and that makes contact with these craftsmen possible. Moreover, these are needs which could not be easily substituted, nor fulfilled by anyone else other than the craftsmen, for example, by their husbands or other kinsmen. Three, members of these caste groups are known in this region to alternate as agricultural labour during peak seasons. Their dual economic activity increases their opportunities of interacting with high-caste women. This interaction could take place at home, in the market or at the common workplace in the fields. The common workplace emerges as the crucial meeting place as the landowning caste women in this region work in their fields, irrespective of their class status.[33] Here it is possible for women to be in close physical proximity with farm-hands, particularly in the absence of their migratory or urban-linked husbands. In the opinion of men and some women, this proximity makes for the vulnerability of high caste women to low caste men. Such a perception perhaps emanates out of the sexual abuse of low caste women by high caste men extending from rape to sexual exploitation and liaisons which are essentially born out of the work and power situation in which low caste women work as agricultural labourers. The reaction of the socially 'impotent' but sexually 'virile' low caste men and their inability to 'protect' their women is unpredictable and makes for not only a volatile situation,[34] but also for the insecurity of high-caste men regarding their own women.

The category of the folk singers and performers like that of *nat, bhand, dom and sangi* is an important one among the low caste men vis-à-vis their relation with high caste women. Although the performing artists from *sang* may well include members from a broad range of caste groups and not necessarily the low castes alone, this profession degrades them socially and paints all of them as inferior. Many of them belong to the dominant castes such as Jats and also Brahmins. Yet, they lose caste and come to be known by their chosen profession alone. According to women, members of performing communities have been most successful in luring young women away. Mostly 'runaways' themselves, they "run away with our *chhories* (girls)", I was informed. According to high caste men, on the other hand, young women feel a peculiar fascination for and are greatly enamoured of these categories of performers. I was told of several instances of women who had "*moonh kala ker gaee*" or run away with *sangis* or *bhands*. According to my men informants, these men were "*na-mard*" (unmanly or effeminate) often impersonating female characters. Hence why 'lustful women' covet 'such men' remains a puzzle to the men I spoke to. All of this signifies the different constructions of masculinity and female desire among men and women. Such articulations in women's songs indirectly attack the self-image of the upper caste male as strong, virile and sexually potent, shattered not by his kinsmen or castemen but by an inferior, who is denigrated and ridiculed by them.

This region is also replete with a large number of proverbs, folktales and jokes about the lower caste groups which are useful in providing insights into how the lower castes are perceived by the dominant caste groups. One particular joke regarding a

Chamar (Chamar is frequently substituted by a member of any other lower caste group while narrating this joke) expresses this pointedly:

> A policeman came to call a Chamar to the local police station. The Chamar, on seeing the policeman approach his house, wore his Chamaran's clothes, hid behind the door and told the policeman that the Chamar was not at home. Unfortunately for him the policeman saw his moustache and thundered: "*Tumhare Moonch kaise jaami*?" (How have you grown a moustache?)
>
> Chamar: "*Hazoor darte kai jaam gai*" (Sir, it grew out of fear).

There are several ways of looking at this joke. Here, I just want to emphasise a few points in relation to my argument in this paper. A man wearing a woman's attire, held inferior, is indeed inferior. He is also fearful. Fear is associated with weaklings, women and low castes. Like the higher caste macho men, the Chamar is represented as wearing a moustache – a sign of manhood. Yet, the joke shows that his manhood is spurious. The lower castes thus stand denigrated, are laughed at as inferior, effeminate, foolish and fearful. The policeman, recruited almost invariably from the dominant caste groups, symbolises the self-image of the dominant caste male members: their masculinity, authority, alertness and the fact that they cannot be deceived.

These images, whether of the lower caste or of the landowning caste groups, are not only accepted by men of dominant castes but also by their women. Yet, the latter show an ambivalent attitude, as they covet the same inferior man in their songs, in preference to their own (superior) men. Lower caste men, out of bounds for higher caste women, tend to attract rather than repulse. Thereby the stereotypical images of both the caste groups, high and low, stand shattered.

Apart from the lower caste groups, the only high caste name which features in these songs, as mentioned above, is that of the Bania. It may be noted here that in the rural north, Banias, like the lower caste groups, have traditionally shared an extremely tense relationship with the agricultural caste groups. As moneylenders and traders, their rapacious ways had assumed legendary dimensions and become the basis of mobilising the peasantry of Punjab and Haryana in the colonial period.[35] Physically categorised as cowards and inferior, Banias have been held both in contempt and in awe, like the lower castes, though for different reasons, by the agriculturist castes. Bracketing them with lower caste groups is a sign of the antagonism directed towards them both, by the agriculturist caste groups.

Locating possible lovers among these caste categories imparts an entirely new dimension to women's songs which may be seen to emanate not merely from sexual desire but also from within the realm of power and politics. The identification of the lovers appears to be deliberate and calculated by women to provoke and challenge the male authority of their caste members. In the post-independence period the rapidly changing social and economic milieu greatly strengthened a process which had emerged in the colonial period itself, that of consolidation of a section of agriculturists as rich peasantry, moneylenders, traders and agro-industrialists. This has gone a long way in easing the traditional antagonism between Banias and the agricultural caste groups. Yet in popular folklore and perception their mutual antagonism and the divide between them in social and political life, as well as their stereotyped images continue. The competition between the two continues to fuel it.

However, the relationship of dominant agricultural caste groups with the lower castes continues to remain tense. In this region, severe caste confrontations existed even in the colonial period.[36] Nowadays the newspapers frequently highlight the growing incidence of high/low caste confrontations and violence in north India which have both caste and class dimensions. Sharper caste contradictions are now emerging from new opportunities for social betterment due to economic growth benefiting some, but not all, lower caste groups. The upwardly mobile among the lower caste groups have taken significant initiatives in several pockets of north India, resulting in violent conflict over material interests with the dominant caste groups.[37] If, on the one hand, this power dynamics illustrates a newer kind of aggression among the lower castes, it also shows a new determination on the part of the dominant castes, made rich through the green revolution technology,[38] to keep their status and position intact specially in relation to the lower castes. Such occasions are used as an opportunity by the higher castes to assert their hegemony and to 'teach a lesson' to those who challenge or wish to do so.[39] On the other hand, the new assertiveness of the lower castes is reflected in their relationship with high-caste women as well as men. Liaisons between them are surfacing more frequently due to the new social pressures generated in the wake of the growing democratising process and greater opportunities being opened up for lower caste groups and increasing refusal on the part of lower caste youths to accept the traditional caste status inflicted upon them.

III

TRANSGRESSIVE DESIRE: GROUND REALITY

Indeed, the field work throws up a large number of cases in which the higher caste women are involved with lower caste men. Perhaps the most shocking of such liaisons because of its brutal fall out is the well-known Mehrana murder case of March 1991. A Jat girl of village Mehrana in western Uttar Pradesh ran away with a low caste Jatav boy assisted by his friend. All the three were caught, tortured the whole night, hanged in the morning and then set on fire while two of them were still alive.[40] This response of the upper castes in a bitter struggle with lower caste groups for assertion of their power and domination leading to violence has its parallel in other parts of India as well.[41]

In Haryana, I have come across several such cases. Except for minor details, these bear striking similarities to the Mehrana case. Two recent cases from village Loharhedi in district Jhajjar, a Jat dominated village, show the disastrous results of the involvement of a dominant caste boy with a lower caste girl and a lower caste boy with a dominant caste girl. In September 2000, Ravinder a Jat boy and Sushila, a Balmiki girl, were hauled up before a caste panchayat in this village. Their love affair was severely condemned. The panchayat decreed that they should be publicly shamed by blackening their faces, cutting off their hair and taking them around the village on donkeys. The decree was duly executed. Ravinder fled the village. The girl was dispatched to her relatives in Bombay. The boy started to visit the village again within six months of this case, but the girl stayed away. Her family feared for her life. There was no guarantee of her safety if she were to return to the village.

The Jats by and large called Sushila a *badmash* girl (bad character) who coveted a Jat boy and aspired to get married to him. As one Jat boy crudely put it 'who wants to marry a *Chuhri*, we only have intercourse with them'. Ravinder's serious involvement with a Balmiki girl could not be tolerated. The punishment had to be exemplary and act as a future deterrent. The Balmiki family was extremely bitter and resentful of the treatment meted out to Sushila. They pointed out that it was unprecedented and against all cultural norms and tradition that a girl could be publicly summoned and punished by the panchayat. They also pointed out another case which took place six months prior to this one in which Sarla, a Jat girl, was involved with Ashok, a Nai boy. No one had dared to behave towards her in such a manner. The couple had run away and got married. They were caught in Mandi, in Himachal Pradesh, and taken into police custody. Sarla was handed over to her natal family where she was brutally beaten and pressurised into condemning Ashok. This led to slapping of cases of abduction, kidnapping and rape on him. Ashok continues to languish in jail. Litigation involving Ashok will possibly go on for a long time to come.

The general opinion of men in this region is that a low caste man, if involved with a high caste woman, is invariably killed. According to reports, Sarla could well have been killed by her family members as seems to be the general pattern in Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, adopted by the landowning families and decreed by the traditional panchayat. Sarla was not killed but was quickly and quietly married off to a Jat boy in a greatly compromised match, in village Nooran Kheda of district Sonepat. It may be noted that in cases such as these, where the girl's 'notoriety' becomes public knowledge, the much desired status hypergamy for the girl cannot be maintained. Sarla's husband and his three brothers are all illiterate and unemployed. With inconsequential landholding, they lack a stable income or other means of support. Sarla's husband is known to be an alcoholic who is given to beating her up frequently. This family is said to be held in great contempt by the villagers. Sarla is believed to be extremely unhappy in her marriage and people opine that she may well commit suicide as many others do in such cases.

There are several such cases which can be cited.[42] Social aspirations and social mobility of the lower caste groups is just not tolerated by the dominant caste groups. They find it threatening and greatly upsetting of the status quo. For condemning such social aspirations an allegedly 'true incident' which took place recently is popularly recounted and held as an example. It is narrated that a scheduled caste officer was heard boasting about getting marriage offers for his son from Jat families. He was soundly beaten up and publicly made to apologise to the Jat *biradari* by holding his ears and rubbing his nose on the ground.

The Balmikis of Loharhedi denounce any such aspirations and maintain that they are as zealous a follower of caste endogamy as the Jats. It may be noted that the lower caste groups are as much hierarchy ridden and caste status conscious as the higher caste groups. In a recent case from village Ahulana in district Gohana, a Chamar boy and a Balmiki girl committed suicide in April 2001 fearing opposition to their marriage.[43] Such suicides are not confined to the lower caste groups. A large number of suicides, or induced suicides by the family members, either of the couple or of the individuals take place because of the antipathy of all caste groups to inter-caste marriages. Even among higher castes of equivalent status such liaisons are not tolerated. Here, I wish to take up the case of village Nayagaon in Bahadurgarh district, which ended up as violently for the couple as the Mehrana case, cited above.

In March 1994 in village Nayagaon, Asha was hacked to death with an axe and so was her lover Manoj from Balaur, an adjacent village, by six of her seven uncles. Asha came from the dominant Saini caste group in the village, while Manoj was Ahir by caste. In terms of caste, general opinion ranks the Sainis and Ahirs as equals in Haryana. But in reality this is a contested ranking. For example, the caste and class dominance of the Sainis in Nayagaon enables them to look down upon Ahirs. So Manoj was declared to be an 'upstart' who coveted a higher ranking caste girl. Manoj and Asha had developed intimacy as high school students and carried on for two years before they were discovered by Asha's family. After that Asha was warned repeatedly but she continued to meet Manoj stealthily. Her defiance had brutal consequences.

According to the Jat and Saini residents of Nayagaon, Asha's uncle did what was necessary and what any one of them would have also done. The uncles, according to them, by eliminating the lovers restored back not only their own *izzat* (honour) but also that of the community and the village as a whole. This was declared to be the only time honoured and traditional way of dealing with such cases. Several cases were cited in which similar steps were taken by members of these two caste groups. Widely believed to be the right step, there is no condemnation of the crime or the perpetrators of the crime.

In fact, I noticed the esteem in which such families come to be upheld. In village Jatau (rural Delhi), for example, a Jat girl ran away with a Bania boy and got married to him. They were both brought back by the father and brother of the girl and killed in village Jatau with the villagers looking on. I was informed that the couple could have been killed anywhere but the native village was chosen so that the villagers might be a witness to this deed and the family's "*izzat banni rahe*" (honour might be maintained).

In rural Haryana those cases which are tabulated as 'sex-crimes' are even officially acknowledged to be 'nothing but cases of love affairs, with abducted women being the consenting party'. But they are reported as cases of kidnapping and abduction.[44] Termed by the dominant caste groups as matters of 'honour' of the entire village, most such cases result in the physical elimination of the girl and the boy. If the boy escapes for some reason, the girl is almost always done away with, or, in unusual cases like that of village Loharhedi, the girl is caught, brought back and remarried. Similarly, more recently in village Kheri in district Bhiwani, the girl was caught, brought back and remarried to an old man despite her four-month pregnancy, which was aborted. The whereabouts of the low caste boy are not known or disclosed. The Jat *biradari* (community) of the girl remains tight lipped about him, though he is rumoured to have been 'disposed of' by them.

Despite brutal retribution for such transgressions by women (and also by men), these continue to take place. The most brutal retribution however is reserved for an unmarried girl. The bestowal of her sexuality in marriage is crucial for patriarchal forces and their concern with caste purity, caste status, power and hierarchy. There are strict caste and kinship codes which have to be observed for the purposes of marriage. Any infringement of these prescribed codes commonly evokes a violent response among high-caste groups.[45] In contrast to this is the reality of a married woman's liaison which may or may not invoke a similar reaction. Violence as a response remains confined to individuals or families, and such cases are not known to get the support of wider caste/community networks or cited as a matter of 'honour' for the entire village. Many such liaisons may even remain an open secret, spoken about in hushed voices. Cases involving widows are similarly treated. In the colonial period 'unchaste' widows among high caste groups were known to take lovers from other caste groups, including lower castes, and even beget children.[46] Yet, their brothers-in-law were keen to claim *karewa* with them and accept their 'illicit' children as their own, for reasons of property and labour. Innumerable court cases in the colonial period indicate that widows openly chose to deny *karewa*, to accept the charge of unchastity, and, in British eyes the notoriety of bearing illegitimate children.[47] This was not only to keep their limited inheritance intact, which they stood to lose in case of remarriage, but also to enjoy the sexual freedom of choosing their own partners. 'Unchastity' and 'lust' clearly had a different connotation for women in real life than in the patriarchal construct.

In the contemporary period, socio-economic reasons and sharpening class/caste rivalries in the rural areas have put the sexuality of married women as well as that of widows under far greater surveillance than earlier. The widow, for example, is sought to be tied down in *karewa* in an 'indecent hurry', not only for property reasons, but also because of the widespread apprehension that she may settle her affections elsewhere, possibly outside the caste, and/or refuse a *karewa* alliance within the conjugal group.[48] Consequently, what appears to exist is a noticeable difference of approach in the rural areas towards handling an unmarried and married woman's amorous liaisons. Yet, the reality of such alliances, cutting across marital status and caste/class/community barriers exist. For instance, in village Depal, district Hissar, Satyavati, a Jat woman was hacked to death with agricultural implements (pitchfork and cleaver) by her male family members in April 1998.[49] Her husband was a truck driver and was frequently away from home. She was suspected to be carrying on with a Balmiki man in his absence.

Women, both married and unmarried, can be seen openly challenging their caste, kinship and status codes, going against the dictates of what is loosely termed as '*dehati* culture'. In view of this reality, women's songs can be seen to reside not merely in the imagination. They certainly provide a cathartic space for such liaisons in the female world which has no legitimacy in the outside world, and also crucially represent life's realities.

IV

CHALLENGE TO SOCIAL ORDER: ATTEMPTS TO CONTROL

This social reality is significant in understanding how and why women's songs discussed earlier are perceived as a threat to the social order. As the self-assertion of women in sexual relationships has been hard for the dominant caste men to accept, a section of dominant male opinion holds these songs responsible for prompting unwarranted desires and doomed attempts.[50] Despite this perception there is no one to one relationship between the two phenomena. The connection is far more ambiguous and lies in the realm of sexuality, caste and cultural codes – all of which stand challenged in women's songs.

Sexuality has been acknowledged as the preserve of the powerful, not that of the dominated or the subordinate. In Haryana, however, both men and women assert that a woman, although held totally inferior and subordinate (in colloquial terms, *pair ki jooti* or footwear) in relation to a man, still exercises one kind of power over him, that is sexual.[51] A wife lusting after her husband in the *biraha* songs similarly can be perceived to suggest a lament for the loss of sexual power which his absence entails. A union is desired, apart from other reasons, for enabling the wife to command such a power not only over the husband but also through him over the conjugal family itself. The time of sexual union is also popularly believed to be the time for the wife to make demands on her husband. It is not without significance that the sexual union of the newly married couple is monitored closely by the elder female of the family, specially the mother-in-law, who fears the sexual enslavement of the son and a diminution of her own influence/power over him. As such these songs represent not only a critique of the power relationships inherent in the conjugal family, as understood by anthropologists, which result in a denial of the importance of the wife and her interests to the demands of patrilineal solidarity.[52] They go far beyond offering a mere critique. In the moral world and understanding of women, these specifically seek to claim or retrieve 'the key' (sexual hold) considered essential to control/manipulate these power relations.

When a dominant-caste woman seeks a sexual relationship with a lower caste man, a power equation is established to the advantage of the high-caste woman in a dual way: sexual as well as that of class/caste. In fact, she is not only in a commanding position to demand sexual favours and companionship but also to dominate the low-caste man as well as any other woman/wife in his life. This assumption of power in women's folk songs is in direct contradiction to her powerlessness in a male world of family/clan/caste which is in a position to demand/command her transgression, or deny it to her, as projected in men's songs. Identification of lovers from castes traditionally antagonistic to their own also suggests how these songs deliberately resonate with the power politics dominated by men. Women's songs effect a reversal and pose a challenge to the reality of sexual exploitation and liaison of lower caste women by men from dominant caste groups, a practice widespread in this region.[53] For men, in other words, such female articulations of desire not only subvert but also invert prevailing social and moral norms: they not only challenge men's moral standards and masculinity and symbolise the assumption of power by women over other men, they also question the assumptions of male moral standards. From men's point of view, women's sexuality in these songs emerges as autonomous, and of necessity disobedient to a power structure which seeks to subdue it but fails to control it entirely.

The concept of sex for procreation is not the only kind of sexual activity that is recognised in rural India. Other sexualities, particularly male, such as homosexuality and bestiality, are also widespread and tolerated. Similarly, sexuality openly celebrated in women's songs/dances is not necessarily connected with procreation, although procreation forms a very significant part of it. It is also pleasurable for its own sake –

with shades of homo-eroticism (as seen in *khoria*), bringing the male and female norms closer. In an all women gathering there is a distinct underlying homo-erotic valence (that Kathryn Hansen speaks about in relation to the all-male *nautanki*) which links not only the two female performers of *khoria*, one of whom impersonates a male, but also the other female participants and the female spectators as well.[54]

At the level of fantasy and desire, women's songs may be taken to portray changed power equations between gender, class and caste. They offer an insight into a different image visualisation/aspiration than that which is offered in the dominant upper caste/class patriarchal world-view. Women's songs hint that women should claim the use of their bodies or engage in sexual transactions according to their own desires. This sexuality is not hedged in by fears and dangers nor does it condone the dominant (male) attitude towards it – that of control and repression or its legitimate channelisation. Women do not see themselves as transgressors or condemn their activity/desires/lustfulness. Men are brought in as sexual players in a total reversal of sexual roles and in a clear subversion of the dominant fixation and idolisation of female chastity and the very concept of the ideal woman.

Women's acceptance and celebration of their lustfulness/sexuality and preference for men other than their caste/class/ kinsmen, particularly from the lower castes, opened these songs to the charge of lewdness. Low caste women are well known to sing sexually explicit songs in this region. Although I was not able to fully document this aspect, I am sufficiently aware of the similarity between the 'lustfulness' of the songs sung by women of both dominant and low caste groups, with one significant difference. The songs of the latter do not identify their lovers. Ann Grodzins Gold who has documented the songs sung by low caste women of the Potter caste in Rajasthan, speaks of the 'lewdness' of their songs which explicitly celebrates extra-marital eroticism.[55] Yet, there is silence on the caste identity of these lovers. Despite a close similarity between the songs sung by women of both high and low caste groups, this silence makes a poignant comment on the imposition of caste/class structures in the rural areas. In Haryana these songs sung by dominant caste women also come close to the bawdy, highly erotic songs sung and dances performed by low caste men who masquerade in an exaggerated manner as women during the festival of Holi and make lewd demands on their high caste male patrons in order to get money.

The association of these songs with low castes has been one of the reasons why they were regarded as '*behuda*' (obscene) not only by reformists but also by upwardly mobile groups among the subordinate castes concerned with their self-image in the process of upward mobility and social acceptability. It is noteworthy that the notion of obscenity in the songs is not simply related to sexual transgression per se but importantly to the transgression of caste/gender boundaries. Also, this transgression crucially attacked upper caste masculinity. The concept of masculinity in the colonial period was undergoing a vast change. Being firmly associated with the emergence of martial Hinduism in the 1920s, it had assumed a more aggressive and physically oriented form.[56] This redefinition greatly strengthened the hands of the dominant landowning martial caste-men of this region to mount their protests against women's songs which ridiculed their masculinity. The redefinition of Hindu identity also reinforced the non-Hindu as the Other. In fact, in neighbouring Uttar Pradesh the everyday interaction of Hindu women with low caste Muslim men was under severe pressure and attack from the Hindu reformists and publicists. This pressure, as Charu Gupta argues, was more towards emphasising Hindu-Muslim identities rather than caste identities.[57] In Haryana the existing evidence suggests the prioritising of caste identities. This emphasis, however, in no way excluded the possibility of reiterating community identities, which were sharpening, as I argue elsewhere, even in this region.[58] Clearly, the Otherness in women's songs consequently had complex connotations, prompting the reformers, among others, to target women's songs in a more determined way.

An important associated aspect in the reworking of Hinduism and masculinity was the importance given to female purity and chastity. There was a renewed emphasis upon these aspects of a woman. A large part of popular literature and tracts published during this period were devoted to the norms of ideal conduct and behaviour for a woman before and after marriage based on the '*pativrata*' and 'stridharma' model of Hinduism. In Bengal in fact, from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, there were concerted efforts among high-caste men to denigrate and suppress the sensuous and bawdy songs and poems popular among low caste social groups.[59] These 'corrupting' and 'indecent' songs were considered unworthy of the new Hindu woman being shaped under the influence of nationalist sentiments and colonial education. In the north, the popularity of the Arya Samaj among the dominant caste groups assured an acceptance of this viewpoint even in rural pockets which were at odds with it.

In fact, in Punjab-Haryana the Arya Samaj led the attack on various customs considered 'immoral and indecent'. The samajists condemned the singing of these 'indecent songs' on ceremonial or festive occasions, along with other forms of behaviour as 'sins' against their puritanical code.[60] Attempts were also made to replace such traditional songs with other, 'purified' versions. The festival of Holi, considered extremely vulgar, was sought to be purified, as the Samaj found it impossible to abolish its observance. However, attempts to replace traditional songs and to cleanse Holi met with no success. Some caste *sabhas* in parts of northern India were also active in attempts to abolish the singing of 'indecent songs'. *Sanadhya Jatiya Sabha* of Agra passed a resolution in 1894 saying: "Women should not sing indecent songs in the weddings".[61] This could hardly be implemented. In colonial Haryana, caste *panchayats* were also known to have taken up the subject, but they failed due to the impracticability of enforcing it.[62]

In the contemporary period, attempts to urbanise culture and to bring the 'rural backwaters' into conformity with male, middle-class, upper caste norms have meant a continuation of such efforts through the caste and *got* (patrilineal clan) *panchayats.* Though moral strictures are known to be frequently voiced by educated men, they were not successful then and they have failed now. The failure of all these attempts shows the limited class nature of the opposition and the wider support which this sub-culture has enjoyed and continues to enjoy both among men and women. Rural women of all caste and age groups have refused to comply with such dictates and the collective voice of these songs has acted as a shield against individual punishment and vindictiveness. In fact, this collectivity has been an important factor in the failure of male attempts to ban such songs.

Yet some educated women, mostly urban, sharing perhaps the views of their male counterparts, either feign ignorance of these 'indecent songs' or refrain from singing them, implying acceptance of the charge of 'indecency'. However, most rural women of different castes and classes justify the songs as part of their *dehati* (rural) culture which they would not like to give up. This is one of the interesting instances when women have appropriated the male logic of keeping the *dehati* culture alive in order to justify retention of this space for themselves. The privacy of this space is evoked by women to retain it and they condemn a public gaze directed towards spheres and spaces which are essentially private and autonomous. Yet, the fate of these songs among sections of rural society remains uncertain. Education, sharpening class divisions, the growing size of upwardly mobile groups and a new morality are relevant factors in the changing scenario. The appropriation and re-modulation of these songs by the male composers of popular film and folk songs, and their subsequent likely acceptance by women in preference to their own voices, has added to this uncertainty.

NOTES

Note: This paper draws substantially from my earlier work titled 'Lustful Women, Elusive Lovers: Identifying Males as Objects of Female Desire', published in the *Indian Journal of Gender Studies,* Jan-Jun. 2001, Vol. 8, no. 1, pp. 23–50. I wish to emphasise that in translating the local dialect, emphasis is on the mood and the message rather than the mere literal meaning.

1. Regarding the paucity of preconceived notions about sexuality in the Indian context and for a brief account of work in this field see Introduction by Mary E. John and Janaki Nair (eds.), *A Question of Silence? The Sexual Economies of Modern India*, New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1996, pp. 1–51.
2. An alternative image and a different reality for women is found in the widespread system of *karewa* (widow remarriage) in the region of Haryana-Punjab. See Prem Chowdhry, 'Conjugality, Law and State: Inheritance Rights as Pivot of Control in Northern India,' *National Law School Journal*, special issue on Feminism and Law, 1993, pp. 95–116.
3. See, for example, a recent work by anthropologists like Gloria Goodwin Raheja and Ann Grodzins Gold, *Listen to the Heron's Words: Reimagining Gender and Kinship in North India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996; Ved Prakash Vatuk (ed.), *Studies in Indian Folk Tradition*, Delhi: Manohar, 1979.
4. The British rulers projected women as tradition-bound to condemn the Indian society and the nationalists emphasized women's traditional virtues to harness their services to the nationalist cause.
5. For such references see Puran Chand Sharma, *Pandit Lakshmi Chand Granthawali*, Chandigarh: Haryana Sahitya Academy, 1996, pp. 14–19.
6. Kathryn Hansen, *Grounds for Play: The Nautanki Theatre of North India*, Delhi: Manohar, 1992, p. 113.
7. See, for example, *ibid.*; also see Ved Prakash Vatuk and Sylvia Vatuk, 'The Anthropology of *Sang* – A North Indian Folk Opera,' in Vatuk, *Studies*, pp. 15–37.

8. Veena Das, 'Masks and Faces: An Essay on Punjabi Kinship', *Contributions to Indian Sociology* (NS), Vol. 10, no. 1, 1976, pp. 1–30.
9. For similar songs in Rajasthan and rural areas of eastern Uttar Pradesh, see Sahab Lal Srivastva, *Folk Culture and Oral Tradition*, New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1974, pp. 28–33.
10. An overwhelming 53 per cent of the male population of Haryana in the decade of 1921-1931 migrated for one reason or the other, whereas the increase in population during this period was less than 7 per cent. *Census of Punjab*, 1931, XVII, part I, Report, pp. 117, 120, and part II, Tables, p. 6.
11. In World War I, this region contributed one-fifth of the total recruitment from Punjab. See M. S. Leigh, *The Punjab and the War*, Lahore: Superintendent, Govt. Printing, 1922, pp. 61–62.
12. This can be estimated by the pressure exercised by the Chief Ministers of Haryana (Bansi Lal and Devi Lal) to get the allotted quota of army recruitment increased for Haryana. Personal communication from Lt. General B.T. Pandit, Adjutant-General, Army Head-quarters, New Delhi, 1 Apr. 1991.
13. The total rural male migration within the state has been calculated in the 1981 census at 54 per cent and to other states of India, 37 per cent. Within Haryana the migration figures of rural females though 80 per cent are accounted for by the marriage patterns followed in the state which completely forbids marriage within the village itself. As compared to this rural female migration to other states of India has been only 4 per cent. *Census of Haryana*, 1981, series 6, part II, Special Report and Tables, pp. 47–61. The recent migration figures for 1991 Census were not available at the time of writing this paper.
14. Ved Prakash and Sylvia Vatuk, 'The Lustful Step-mother in the Folklore of North-Western India', in Vatuk, *Studies*, pp. 190–221; Hansen, *Grounds for Play*, pp. 174–80.
15. For details see Prem Chowdhry, *The Veiled Women: Shifting Gender Equations in Rural Haryana 1880-1990*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994, pp. 74–83, 364–66. It is only fair to record here that there also exist several sayings of women which deplore this association with the *devar*. See *ibid.*, pp. 112–14.
16. For details see Hansen, *Grounds for Play*, pp. 27–32.
17. Prem Chowdhry, 'Popular Perceptions of Widow-remarriage in Haryana: Past and Present', in Bharati Ray (ed.), *From the Seams of History: Essays on Indian Women*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995, pp. 37–66.
18. Communication from Khem Chand *Sangi*, village Govad, Sonepat district, 15 Oct. 1988.
19. See, for example, a report titled 'Lewd Lyrics', *India Today*, Weekly, 31 March 1991, pp. 163-65.
20. Tytti Soila has succinctly argued this point in relation to the Swedish cinema. See her 'Valborgsmassoafton: Melodrama and Gender Politics in Swedish Cinema', in Richard Dyer and Ginette Vincendeau (eds.), *Popular European Cinema*, London and New York: Routledge, 1992, pp. 232–44.
21. For example, a local proverb, eulogising such an alliance maintained:

badi bahu bade bhag chhota bandra ghane suhag
(An older or taller wife brings good fortune,
As also does a younger or shorter bridegroom.)

22. E. Joseph, *Customary Law of the Rohtak District, 1910*, Lahore: Superintendent, Govt. Printing, 1911, p. 19.
23. See for example *Punjab Record*, 1892, Vol. 27, Kalu vs. Musammat Aisha, pp. 429–30.
24. *Karewa, Karao or Chaddar Andazi* is a custom of widow remarriage followed in the geographical region of Punjab-Haryana since the Vedic period. *Karewa*, a white sheet with coloured corners, was thrown by the man over the widow's head, signifying his acceptance of her as his wife. This custom represented social consent for cohabitation. Significantly, this form of remarriage was not accompanied by any kind of religious ceremony, as no woman could go through the full religious wedding ceremony (*biah*) twice.
25. Prem Chowdhry, 'Conjugality, Law and State', 1993, pp. 95–116.
26. Personal communication from Uma Chakravarti based on unpublished interviews with women activists dealing with the post-1984 riots. Also see Veena Das, 'Our Work to Cry, Your Work to Listen', in her edited work *Mirrors of Violence: Communities, Riots and Survivors in South Asia*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990, pp. 345–98.
27. Veena Das, 'Marriage Among the Hindus', in Devaki Jain (ed.) *Indian Women*, New Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Govt. of India, 1975, pp. 76–86.
28. The male voice maintains:
    koi khinche lang langoti, koi khinche mucharyan
    kothe charh ke di duhai, koi mat karyo do janyani.
    (One wife strips off his loin cloth and the other pulls at his moustache
    So he cries from the house tops, let no man marry two wives.)
    The female voice asserts:
    saukan chun ki bhi buri (a co-wife, though of flour, is intolerable).
29. According to Kathryn Hansen, transgressive themes across boundaries of caste and class have been dealt with by *Nautanki* plays. In these liaisons the female is high-class/caste born as against the low-class/caste male belonging to a different caste group. Such a theme has two possible outcomes: a tragic one where the lovers die, and a happy one where the female takes an aggressive initiative to rescue her passive lover, followed by their marriage. In this entirely male rendering, meant for a male audience, Hansen leaves unexplored the possible responses to the passive and emasculated role assigned to the hero and the aggressive *virangana* (warrior woman) role played by the heroine. Hansen, *Grounds for Play*, pp. 157–63.
30. The song (which regretfully I have not been able to preserve) recounts joyfully, how a Bania *chhora* (boy) had caught hold of the singer's hand when she had gone to fetch water from the well, and followed her home despite her protests and entreaties.
31. *Rohtak District Gazetteer, 1910*, III-A, Lahore: Civil and Military Gazette, 1911, 60–62.
32. Denzil Ibbetson, *Punjab Castes: Races, Castes and Tribes of the People of Punjab*, first published 1910, reprint, New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1981, p. 226.

33. For details see Prem Chowdhry, 'High Participation, Low Evaluation: Women and Work in Rural Haryana', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 25 Dec. 1993, Vol. XXVIII no. 52, pp. A135–A148.
34. In this connection, it is significant to note that the extreme left Marxist-Leninist groups in Bihar have successfully used the resentment and resistance of lower castes to the sexual exploitation of their women by higher caste landowning class men as a mobilisation issue and strategy. See People's Union for Democratic Rights, *Bitter Harvest: The Roots of Massacres in Central Bihar*, Delhi: Secretary, PUDR, Aug. 1992.
35. Prem Chowdhry, *Punjab Politics: The Role of Sir Chhotu Ram*, Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1984, pp. 40–64.
36. For such caste confrontations and the role played by socio-economic issues see *ibid.*, pp. 61–99.
37. For example in western Uttar Pradesh, the Jat and Jatav (Chamar) rivalry has resulted in violent confrontations. For issues involved see Owen M. Lynch, 'Rioting as Rational Action', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 29 Nov. 1981, Vol. XVI, no. 48, pp. 1951–56. Also for different accounts of their conflicts see *Hindustan Times*, 28 Sep. 1989; 29 Jun 1990.
38. The green revolution involved the introduction of capitalist economy in agriculture in the mid-60s which achieved a major breakthrough in agricultural production in less than a decade. The strategy involved providing irrigation facilities, the use of electricity, improved agricultural implements in combination with greater use of organic and inorganic fertilisers and the introduction of high-yielding varieties of food grains.
39. This is a phrase frequently voiced by the landowners of Haryana. Personal observation made during my field work in Haryana.
40. For extensive media coverage of this case see *Hindustan Times*, 7 May 1991, p. 1; 29 Sep. 1991, p. 7; *Times of India*, 11 Apr. 1991, p. 6; 30 Mar. 1991, p. 5; *India Today*, 30 Apr. 1991, pp. 122–5; *Illustrated Weekly*, 20–6 Apr. 1991, pp. 16–19, pp. 16–19; Sunday, 14–20 Apr. 1991, p. 15.
41. For this see a most incisive report by Samata Sanghtana, 'Upper Caste Violence: Study of Chunduru Carnage', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 7 Sept. 1991, Vol. XXVI, No. 36, pp. 2079–84; also Vasanth Kannabiran and Kalpana Kannabiran, 'Caste and Gender: Understanding Dynamics of Power and Violence', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 14 Sep. 1991, Vol. XXVI, no. 37, pp. 2130–33; K. Balagopal, 'Post Chunduru and other Chundurus', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 19 Oct. 1991, Vol. XXVI, no. 42, pp. 2399–2405.
42. In another notorious case of April 1998, in village Juaan, district Sonepat, a landowning Jat family suspected one of their girls to be involved with a lower caste boy, whose family worked as agricultural labourers in their fields. The landowning males took the matter in their hands by beating up the male members of this family when they were working in their fields, who had to be hospitalised. They also raped the wife of one of them and mutilated her private parts. The PSO at Gaunaur refused to register their complaint for three days. Only after the lower caste groups surrounded the police station was the FIR lodged. The case got registered, but was opined to be extremely weak for any conviction of the culprits in a court of law. This left great bitterness all

around. In Hissar rural areas such cases are on the increase, but very few convictions are made as the police is in with the dominant caste groups, who also have political connections. The accused invariably get scot free. See *Dainik Jagran*, 20 Apr. 1998, pp. 1&13; 12 May 1998, p. 4.

43. *Dainik Bhaskar*, 25 April 2001, p. 1.
44. *Mahendergarh District Gazetteer*, Chandigarh, Government of Haryana, 1988, p. 233.
45. For details see Prem Chowdhry, 'Enforcing Cultural Codes: Gender and Violence in Northern India', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXXII, no. 19, 10 May 1997, pp. 1019–28.
46. For these see *Punjab Records*, 1900 Vol. 35, Indi vs. Bhaga Singh and others; 1888, Vol. 23, Partabha vs. Phango, pp. 241–42; see also case no. 2, Nur Begam vs. Sadar-ud-din Khan.
47. See, for example, *Indian Cases*, 1931, Vol. 29, Parji vs. Mangta, pp. 767–8; *Punjab Records*, 1912, Vol. 13, Kuri vs. Des Raj, pp. 315–16; Punjab Law Reporter, 1910, Vol. 11, Malan vs. Ruia, pp. 275–7; Punjab Record, 1893, Vol. 28, Hira Singh vs. Rani, pp. 317–21; 1883, Vol. 18, Prema vs. Pradhan, pp. 414–19. Also see R. Humphreys, *Customary Law of the Hoshiyarpur District*, Vol. XXVII, Lahore, Superintendent, Govt. Printing, 1908, who gives a large number of cases concerning different agricultural caste groups, pp. 113–18.
48. My field work shows that there are several instances in the villages where the widows have been remarried to their *devar* within a few weeks of the essential *teravin* (thirteenth day-after-death ceremony) of the husband, when custom decrees at least a year's interval.
49. This case was also reported in *Dainik Jagran*, 30 Apr. 1998, p. 3.
50. Rural women, by and large, did not share this opinion, and others showed themselves concerned with the effects of cinema and TV on the growing generation.
51. Yet, this 'power' over her husband can only be exercised in relation to its demand and is not autonomous of it. This power too diminishes in a social system which allows/encourages polygamy. An important reason for the acute misery of co-wives, apart from several other reasons, may well be the transfer of this (sexual) power into the hands of the husband in a polygamous system, depriving the co-wives of the only effective power which they may have wielded.
52. Gloria Goodwin Raheja, 'On the Uses of Subversion: Redefining Conjugality', in Raheja and Gold, *Heron's Words*, pp. 121–48.
53. Although not many cases are given publicity, this remains a well-known fact in rural areas of northern India. A popular story going around in Haryana narrates how a *zamindar* (landowner) deeply perturbed by the impertinent behaviour of his young *kamin* (low caste) agricultural labourer, hauled up the labourer's father. To the angry complaints of the *zamindar*, the father replied: 'Sir, this impudence is because he is one of you. If he were one of us he would not have behaved so'. Narrated by Ram Chander, village Bandh, 20-21 Aug. 1988. It is also an open secret that a large number of children among low caste women are fathered by high caste landowners.
54. Kathryn Hansen, '*Stri Bhumika*: Female Impersonators and Actresses on the Parsi Stage,' *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXXIII, No. 35, 29 Aug. 1998, pp. 2291–300.

55. See Hansen, 'Sexuality, Fertility, and Erotic Imagination in Rajasthani Women's Songs', in Raheja and Gold, *Heron's Words*, pp. 30–72.
56. Charu Gupta, 'Articulating Hindu Masculinity and Femininity: 'Shuddhi' and 'Sangathan' Movements in United Provinces in the 1920s', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXXIII, no. 28, 28 March 1998, pp. 727–36.
57. Charu Gupta, 'Hindu Women , Muslim Men: Cleavages in Shared Spaces of Everyday Life, United Provinces, c. 1890-1930,' *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. 37, no. 2, 2000, pp. 121–49.
58. Prem Chowdhry 'Contours of Communalism: Religion, Caste and Identity in South-East Punjab', *Social Scientist*, Vol. 24, nos. 4–6, Apr.-Jun., 1996 pp. 130–63.
59. Sumanta Banerjee, 'Marginalization of Women's Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Bengal', in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (eds.), *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1989, pp. 127–79.
60. Kenneth W. Jones, *Arya Dharma: Hindu Consciousness in Nineteenth Century Punjab*, Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1976, pp. 94–95. Other practices sought to be abolished were: excessive mourning, public bathing, liquor and meat eating.
61. See *Sanadhaya Jatiya Sabha*, report of the second annual meeting at Agra. India Office Library and Records, Vernacular Tracts, no. 1111. These are now known to be common occurrences.
62. Communication from Khem Lal Rathee, New Delhi, 24 May 1986.

CHAPTER 7

Friends and Lovers: Towards a Social History of Emotions in 19th and 20th Century Kerala

G. Arunima

Throughout history, people have fallen in and out of love, dreamt, fought and married. Yet very little of what preoccupies human existence finds its way into historical narratives. This is a preliminary attempt towards a social history of emotions by exploring primarily two kinds of imaginations – those of nineteenth century novels and twentieth century women's autobiographies, in Kerala. Here I shall examine representations of ideas of love (and friendship) and how these may differ not simply across time, but also between different kinds of narratives. Elsewhere I have argued that ideas of friendship within early Malayalam novels appear to be setting the standards of morality to be emulated by a true lover. The demands of both love and friendship are often the same – be they truth, constancy or fidelity. Even the language of friendship reflects sentiments similar to the language of love. Within novels, while friendship is a condition of love, love need not be predicated on an explicit notion of friendship.[1] This is challenged to a large extent by the women's autobiographies (and later, differently by socialist plays, which I shall only briefly outline here). Even as the novels appear to be idealized projections of certain social aspirations, the autobiographies are complex accounts of friendship, love and 'companionate' marriage. Indeed, in both the autobiographies under scrutiny here, it is clear that love is a shared domain of ideas, ordeals and often the unromantic mundaneness of everyday life. Moreover, ideas of companionship and sharing are not static – they change according to attitudes and circumstances. But what is striking, despite the transitions indicated, is how important it was for these women to see their husbands as their friends and companions.

This raises important and interesting questions about gender, emotions and the problem of writing. At the outset it might be tempting to say that the simplest difference of course is between male novelists representing women's emotions as opposed to women writing about their own lived experience. However, it would be incorrect to assume a simplistic trajectory for gendering strategies, as emotions are complex and often inconsistent. Here I compare certain elements across these different texts as an entry point for thinking about the relationship between history and writing. The early Malayalam novels focused almost exclusively on romantic love, which found its apotheosis in monogamous marriage. Romantic love was sustained through mutual attraction and did not require friendship to enable, or to cement it. In the west too, romantic love and marriage were the central themes of the bourgeois novel.[2] Though these ideas were imported into the Indian novel, their articulation was very distinctive, as societal notions of what constituted the natural family in the nineteenth century were very different in England and India. Additionally, Kerala, being a melange of castes and communities, was unique in possessing groups practising both matrilineal and patrilineal kinship. Marriage in Kerala therefore was quite different from other parts of the country and in the nineteenth century it was organized in a variety of different ways, depending on the community.

Briefly, in what was possibly a unique historical situation, sections of the matrilineal Nayar and Samanthar elite had customary marriages (*sambandham*) with sections of the patrilineal Brahmin (mostly Nambudiri, but sometimes Tamil Brahmin) castes. For most matrilineal castes, Nayars, Thiyas and others, marriage was a union that did not involve priests or sacraments. Entering a union required a minimum of customary observances; leaving it, for either man or woman, was not particularly difficult either. Until the latter half of the nineteenth century and the emergence of towns and non-agrarian professions, most of these *sambandham* unions did not result in the married couple living together, or setting up a separate family home. According to matrilineal custom both men and women continued, even after marriage to live in their separate natal homes. The men visited their wives periodically, but this was primarily for sexual and procreative purposes. Normatively, *sambandham* did not entail the sharing of property, and any children born of the union belonged to the mother's family. For the most part, patrilineal joint families were not very different from matrilineal ones, though by the latter half of the nineteenth century a gradual difference emerged in the sociology of the new families. In the new towns of Talaseri and Kozhikode in Malabar and Kollam and Thiruvanathapuram in Travancore there were a growing number of families that were set up by men who had gone to find jobs there. In fact Chandu Menon, whose novel *Indulekha* was set within a matrilineal household, himself grew up in Talaseri in a house built by his father. What was more, in a decisive break with tradition he took on the name of this house, Oyyarathu, as his own (traditionally it would have been either the name of his maternal household, or his maternal uncle that he would have used). However, these new residential patterns did not translate into an abandoning of matrilineal kinship; they merely provided an alternate form of family organization, which would later gain greater popularity.

Marriage, especially the kind based on romantic love, was definitely not a recognized form of social organization in this period. This is not to argue that love, either as a literary trope, or a human emotion, was unknown till the late nineteenth century in Kerala. Just as with Victorian England, as Peter Gay says ironically in his sophisticated reading of the period, "the age does not neatly divide into decades of mindless repression followed by decades of unbuttoned tolerance", so does the social history of Kerala not divide into an age of joint familial oppression followed by the happy release of loving, monogamous marriage. Social transformations occurred as a result of complex and competing ideas jostling each other to find space; the narratives that emerged in their wake displayed a similar proclivity for accommodating different social moments, attitudes and desires.

On a closer scrutiny narratives like the novel and the autobiography emerge not simply as a result of a changing social practice of writing, but also because of new ideas about time, memory and selfhood. Charles Taylor, using Walter Benjamin's idea of "homogeneous, empty time" and Benedict Anderson's understanding of the effect of this objectified time on literature, makes an argument about the changing relationship between people relating to, and narrating, their lives in modern western contexts.[3] This changed sense of time is intimately linked to a new notion of selfhood and subjectivity – "the disengaged, particular self, whose identity is constituted in memory".[4] The narratives of this new self find voice in both autobiography and literature, linked as they are through a chain of events with causal connections and the need to retell the story of such a life. Life, like novels, has a discrete beginning and an end. It leads inexorably, despite the many pitfalls, from one to the other.

In India, colonialism enabled an encounter with these ideas of selfhood and narrative which had evolved in the west, though they were reconfigured in interesting and hybridized ways here. Within India too there were temporal and sometimes substantive differences in the reception and reaction to these ideas.[5] Taylor's discussion of the "individuation and internalisation" of the self, and the growth of the idea of "companionate marriage" goes to the heart of the emotional and institutional transitions in the cultural and moral system of nineteenth century western societies.[6] This has an important resonance for the colonial context too, albeit with a difference. Unlike the west where "companionate marriage" spelt a new ordering of obligations and responsibilities that extracted the husband and wife from wider kin networks and emphasized their emotional tie, in India the transition was neither so sharp nor so immediate. The changing social context that enabled monogamous marriage (which need not be "companionate") and neolocal residence simply complicated existing kinship practices. The gradual withering away of kinship as witnessed over the past couple of hundred years in western societies never really happened in India. Kinship patterns adapted themselves to accommodate this new form of marriage, and its attendant familial form. A change in kinship patterns or family forms, or indeed the existence of a clearly articulated ideology justifying this, did not mean that love was the lubricant fuelling this change. Whether in the older "joint family" or in the quickly emerging nucleated forms which were substituting this, marriages were still 'arrangements' made between elders of different families. These were always within the boundaries of caste and community. In that context how does one read narratives about love? How do they relate to the changes that occurred in nineteenth century Kerala?

Yet by the twentieth century we do have 'love' marriages like those of Kalyani Amma and Ramakrishna Pillai or Rosie and CJ Thomas, as is testified by the autobiographies. This raises some significant questions. Nowhere in the early Malayalam novels does it seem that the loving couple faced any societal opprobrium. How does one understand the 'normalizing' of love within novels of the late nineteenth century, if this was contrary to the accepted forms of social behaviour? How far did love become a prerequisite, let alone an ingredient, for marriage in Kerala? How far can one assume the influence of Victorian values on Indian life? Were Indian ideas of romantic love or companionate marriage similar to their Victorian counterparts?

To begin with the last question first, clearly there was a world of difference between Indian and English notions of love and marriage in the nineteenth century. By the nineteenth century the English upper classes were fashioning marriage as an elaborate ritual involving significant periods of courtship and engagement. Romantic love was desirable and acceptable as long as certain boundaries, mainly of class and to a lesser extent of religious community, were maintained.[7] In Kerala, love entered people's lives legitimately via the literary domain, but the attendant rituals, especially of courtship were certainly unknown. So unlike their Victorian upper class exemplars who were creating rituals of pre-marital loving, the Malayalis at the turn of the century were simply enamoured of the idea of love, and were not domesticating it. In fact even when "love marriages" began to occur as early as the first decade of the twentieth century (as in the case of Kalyani Amma), these were not so much part of a wider phenomenon with structures of social expectation as aberrant occurrences which were tolerated as long as they were not too transgressive. In fact, liaisons such as those between Thiya women and European men, in Malabar, which hitherto had had social acceptance, were under attack by the late nineteenth century.[8] Therefore, 'love marriage' in its different manifestations never seems to have become a part of legitimate social or kinship practices. Marriage continued to be a part of the familial domain, to be conducted according to the norms of the community. Love, as it might exist, was that part of the armoury that individuals might utilize in distancing themselves from the rigidity of such community norms.

The question being posed here then is, how does one examine the social history of private lives of people living through changes in family, economy and social ties? What do friendship, love, companionship or marriage mean in emotional terms to Malayalis living at the turn of the century, and was this different from the mid-twentieth century?

COMPANIONS IN LOVE

In the novels the distinction between friends and lovers is clear and does not complicate the narrative (here I shall focus principally on O. Chandu Menon's *Indulekha* (1889); C.V. Raman Pillai's *Marthanda Varma* (1891); and Padoo Menon's *Lakshmi Keshavam* (1892)). What strikes one in both the autobiographies under scrutiny here (B. Kalyani Amma, *Vyazhavatta Smaranakal* [Memories of a Twelve Year Interlude] (1916); Rosie Thomas, *Ivan Enttee Priya CJ* [He, My Dear CJ] (1970, but about the 1940s and 1950s)) is that they focus principally only on their marriages, where the spouses combine attributes of friends, lovers and husbands. The virtual absence of any independent friends or acquaintances is possibly a combination of the asymmetry in the worlds inhabited by men and women as an everyday lived reality, but also a method of narrativizing priorities. This is in contrast to the novels which have absolutely no texture regarding the lived experience of relationships, yet different orders of friendships do appear here, in the guise of different characters.

The autobiographies, while being about love and marriage, are also about the women as lovers, wives and writers. These multiple identities constitute them, and shape their subjectivity and agency. *Vyazhavatta Smaranakal* by B. Kalyani Amma and *Ivan Entte*

Priya CJ by Rosie Thomas are both apparently accounts of their husbands, but in the event narrativize their marriages. Both Swadeshabhimani Ramakrishna Pillai and CJ Thomas were significant literary and cultural figures in Kerala, separated by a generation and political persuasion. Given the immense complexity of both lives, and the turns and twists of both narratives, here I will concentrate only on certain issues. Both these marriages were what could be described as "love marriages", both were not long lived (because of the deaths of the husbands due to ill health), both faced tremendous challenges, financial and otherwise, yet faced life courageously. Both are stories of immense endurance and patience, but more than that they are stories of actual sharing and tremendous mutual support. That apart, there are differences in the autobiographical form that indicate differences in generation and attitude which inflect their views on marriage, love and indeed on the very act of remembering.

Vyazhavatta Smaranakal by B. Kalyani Amma was first published in 1916, soon after the death of her husband. In a preface she states that the book was to honour a pact they had made – that whoever survived would write the story of their marriage. While *Vyazhavatta Smaranakal* is not a hagiographical biography, yet the proximity of its writing to Ramakrishna Pillai's death inflects Kalyani Amma's way of remembering her husband. Though not lacking in its humorous moments, overall the book has a tone of seriousness and is overshadowed by the experience of death. It is a remembrance at the time of deep mourning (which she practiced by wearing black saris in this period, influenced by the mission school where she taught) and bears the stamp of an unconditional sorrow.

Their life together could be divided into three parts – the initial years leading up to marriage; the years around Ramakrishna Pillai's exile (he was exiled from Travancore state for criticizing its functioning); and finally his last years, which were overlain by illness. Though she does not dwell on it at sufficient length, Ramakrishna Pillai and Kalyani Amma knew each other for four years before getting married to each other. He was an established, and already controversial journalist and man of letters; she had begun a minor literary career for herself by translating from English to Malayalam and publishing in certain literary journals. This was the turn of the century. Throughout the narrative we get only a few tantalising glimpses of Kalyani Amma, lavish as she is with the details of the work and world of her husband. It is from her daughter's autobiographical essays[9] that one learns of Kalyani Amma's own extraordinary achievements. She was the first woman to pass the matriculation examination in Travancore and one of the first graduates amongst Nayar women in 1913. In fact it was her intellect that probably attracted Ramakrishna Pillai to her.

Rosie Thomas's *Ivan Entte Priya CJ* is an extraordinary literary achievement. It is the poignant love story of a marriage between two extremely strong willed, independent and, in many ways, different people, told with immense irony and humour. CJ Thomas, like Ramakrishna Pillai was a very important figure in the twentieth century Malayalam literary history and one of the central figures of the *Purogamana Sahitya Prasthanam* [Progressive Writers' Movement]. Along with M.P. Paul and Joseph Mundasseri, he constituted a pivotal point in an emergent left wing literary sensibility and criticism. Though his initial political development was within the Communist party, over time he developed a strong critique of party functioning and became one of the earliest campaigners for democratic rights and politics in Kerala.

Throughout the book Rosie Thomas moves back and forth between their early days and life together. As CJ was involved in a variety of different literary and cultural ventures (theatre, illustrations, writing, even some cinema) they moved to different parts of Kerala, and for short stints, to Madras. Their home was the hub of cultural and political life and we are given glimpses of the range of people and ideas that made up the everyday life of families that emerged in the wake of the left movement. Rosie Thomas's autobiography is important as she delicately weaves the personal and the political into a complex social biography. Marriages like theirs were a product of changes in ideas and attitudes about love, life and families. Yet these were not the result of either the activities or the ideology of the Communist Party. In fact, the Party never really possessed a radical critique of marriage and family. What it did create is a more sustained criticism of property and ostentatious living. By the 1940s and 1950s marriages like Rosie and CJ Thomas's were not unusual in Kerala. They probably combined ideas about romantic love with socialist notions about property; the result was a transformation in everyday life, which I would argue pushed the limits of official left ideology in India.

Both these autobiographies are as much about love as they are about writing. Both women refigure their subjectivity in this act of remembrance. But this is not simply as a 'loving' subject, but also as a 'writing' one. Women, writing of themselves as lovers, are engaged in an activity which is as much about loving as inscribing the self. Love within these autobiographies surpasses the narrow possibilities of the nineteenth century novel. Friends and lovers blend into each other without antagonism.

NATURE

How must one understand the idea of love within the early Malayali novelistic imagination? Its exploration, for instance, is always 'pre-marital'. Moreover romantic love is restricted to the early encounter, then developed as part of a painful separation, until the final denouement resulting in marriage. The traits that make a woman loveable – like goodness, beauty, wit, and intelligence – are also signs of her virtue, and these are never developed or strengthened as part of a relationship. In fact it would not be excessive to say that the idea of a relationship is missing from these novels. The notion of "interiority", intrinsic to the creation of a private sphere, which was not simply domestic or personal, but an intimate private realm of emotions,[10] was clearly present only at an elemental stage in these novels. 'Love', at best, becomes a series of moves that seem to constitute a courting ritual. This limited and circumscribed nature of romance then becomes a set of motifs: each symbolizing a moment within this ritual. That marriage is the resolution of all these novels is a given, and despite the fact of choice and desire being key elements within this, it is not particularly transgressive. Except in *Marthanda Varma*, the families actually approve of the relationship between the couple. In *Marthanda Varma*, Parukutty's mother attempts to convince her to marry another man as she thinks that Anandapadmanabhan is dead.

In real life, courting itself has a different meaning depending on the context. The story of Ramakrishna Pillai proposing marriage to Kalyani Amma is recounted with verve. There are two interesting moments in this anecdote that illustrate the quality of their relationship. One is the first time he visits her, an occasion spent discussing literature and literary trends. Ramakrishna Pillai first heard of Kalyani Amma because she had translated a short story from English and published it in a Malayalam journal. Clearly, despite the difference in age, there was mutual respect and excitement about each other's ideas. However as he could not muster enough courage to ask for her hand in marriage, he left, only to return unannounced the next day and to ask her impetuously to marry him. She, taken aback by this show of intensity, reproved him for making demands of her that she could not comply with. Moreover, she added, they scarcely knew each other. Ramakrishna Pillai retorted with amused irritation that most marriages in Kerala were based on such non-acquaintance and that she suffered from an imagination influenced by an excessive reading of novels. As a part of attempting to convince Kalyani Amma to marry him, he began sending her a copy of each of the books that he had written. The topics ranged from philosophy (on Socrates) and agriculture, to the duties of women.[11] Both these events are expressions of a changing desire for marriages with a difference. It is not merely their companionship, but also the fact that they shared everything from common intellectual concerns to mundane everyday matters that is emphasized throughout the book.

Curiously enough, it was actually their daughter who addressed the fact that this was a rather unusual marriage for Kerala at this time.[12] There were many aspects to this difference – apart from striving for a shared domain, its profound monogamous commitment was also unusual at this time. Though Gomathi Amma highlights this too starkly, it was not so much the ethnographic fact of monogamous marriage (which was definitely not unusual amongst Nayars, contrary to anthropological opinion) but the fact of locating in monogamy the spirit of marriage that was unusual amongst Nayars of this period. Gomathi Amma attributes this commitment in her mother to the growth of 'English' education in Kerala. She adds that "that my father could desire his wife's love and keep it, is admirable",[13] and in her view it was her father's love and respect for her mother that allowed her to support him wholeheartedly. In fact, Gomathi Amma comments that Ramakrishna Pillai's famous Malayalam biography of Karl Marx written in 1912 idealizing Marx's relationship with his wife Jenny, describing her as the perfect embodiment of the 'companionate wife', was possibly a transference of his feelings towards his own wife.[14] While Gomathi Amma's account may suffer from filial sentimentalism, it is pertinent that Kalyani Amma's identification with her husband's cause was so strong that she never returned to Travancore even after his death, as he had been exiled from there. 'Love', in this time of transitional matrilineal families in Kerala, in Kalyani Amma's case for her husband, was constituted by a commitment not only to him, but also to all the components of the nuclear family – monogamy, co-residence and shared economic resources. While Ramakrishna Pillai was inordinately productive throughout his life, increasing ill health (eventually diagnosed as tuberculosis of which he died) meant that it was Kalyani Amma who supported the family by teaching. Interestingly enough, her taking up paid employment never became an issue between them; on the contrary he encouraged her throughout her life to study further. Compatibility and companionship in their marriage were structured by sharing everything from financial worries to a deep love of literary matters.

Rosie Thomas's vivid descriptions of the early years leading up to marriage in *Ivan Entte Priya CJ* – the travails, their shyness, the first kiss, their letters – is more forthright about the intimate nature of their relationship. Rebellious, sharp tongued, radical and creative, CJ Thomas fell in love with Rosie, the daughter of his mentor and friend, M.P. Paul. At the time they got involved, he was a teacher at Paul's college and she a science student. Their courtship did not have the ease of familial acceptance that the novels assume, nor indeed of that in the case of Ramakrishna Pillai and Kalyani Amma. On the contrary, there were many impediments, of which societal opprobrium about "love" itself was very important. She describes the immense amount of restraint that each of them naturally placed on themselves, in keeping with the times and their upbringing. We shall discuss these later.

IMPEDIMENTS

The world of the nineteenth century Malayalam novel seems rather spare and simple, and rather in contrast to the lives of the people who must have read them. This complicates our understanding of the reality present within these texts. While it would be correct to say that a concern with reality was very important for the modern novelist, it is also important to be vigilant to the fact that they often fashioned this reality by a creative engagement with the world outside. The presence of certain tropes or novelistic strategies then becomes an interesting point from which to read a sensibility regarding customs or emotions. Take for instance the obstacles or impediments to a union, which are indicators of the nature of social constraints (and not simply novelistic strategy). In *Indulekha*, Madhavan is misinformed about Indulekha marrying someone else and he decides to leave Kerala forever. While this kind of motif of misunderstanding – separation – reconciliation is reasonably common in novels, it is more interesting here to explore what this motif taps into. Why does Madhavan and Indulekha's love almost collapse in the face of such a baseless report? Structurally, such an idea seems plausible only in a context where communication between men and women was limited and controlled. In nineteenth century Kerala, social spaces were clearly segregated and the opportunity for men and women to meet and interact was almost negligible. Moreover, it is interesting that the rumour is of Indulekha marrying Suri Nambudiri, which again is within the realm of probability for Nayars of her background. Indeed, earlier on in the novel, in a reflective moment, Madhavan wonders if Indulekha really loves him, as she is lovely enough to have married a Nambudiri or a raja. Here is a moment of social reality combining with a personal anxiety. Chandu Menon's attempt to explore a certain reality of Malabar marriages through the psychological position of the thwarted lover has a wider implication. Madhavan's fear of rejection reaches out far beyond the confines of his individual self – his fate symbolizes the predicament of the Nayars, especially of the younger generation. However, as yet the response to such a hypothetical rejection is an unhappy acceptance on the part of the young Nayar man. In fact the transformative agency in this situation is with Indulekha – while she spurns the Nambudiri's lascivious advances with scarcely contained disdain, she is unable to address Madhavan's disappearance with the same kind of confidence.

In *Lakshmi Keshavam*, Lakshmi first meets Keshavan in the porch of her father's town house in Madras. This unlikely setting for the meeting of a young Malayali man and woman, unrelated by blood, has been greeted with much ire by contemporary critics.[15] Possibly, it was to safeguard against such charges of 'unreality' within a 'realist' novel that many novelists, including Chandu Menon chose to make their lovers cousins, or relatives permitted to marry according to customary norms. The occasion for Lakshmi's and Keshavan's first meeting was her father, Kanmaran Nayar's birthday lunch. "All the men sat in one row and in the other, facing Kanmaran Nayar and Keshavanunni Nayar, sat Ikavamma, Lakshmikutty and Meenakshi".[16] This was a pretty unusual seating arrangement as even today, in many Kerala families, women of the household would not sit down to dine along with men, especially if they were visitors. Nevertheless, this allowed the two protagonists to 'see' one another. This play with social spaces is an indication of the writer's awareness of how difficult it was for men and women to meet, let alone fall in love, in late nineteenth century Kerala.

The idea of "love" then works both in the realm of desire and that of fantasy in the novels. In a way these are truly fictional exercises as they are creating the space for a new kind of loving. It is here that the late nineteenth century Malayali novelists were beginning to make a difference. It was not that love as an emotion was unknown prior to the nineteenth century; it was also not that love was an unknown theme in literary explorations. The nineteenth century novel democratized love: it made what had hitherto been an aristocratic literary emotion, available to ordinary people. However, this democratizing instinct was conditional. And the condition was that love must lead to marriage. Love as a means to a desirable end then acquires a legitimizing value. It is significant that there is never any opposition to young love in these novels; if anything the impediments are caused due to chance and circumstance. Love is desirable as it leads to marriage and more than anything, for many among the matrilineal community monogamous marriage was the most desirable institution. Nevertheless, this did not lead to the emergence of novels about marriage in this period; on the contrary the novelists merely played around with the form of the romantic novel that they had inherited from the west.

Though Kalyani Amma's experience appears to have been different, it needs to be borne in mind that her situation was possibly an exception. Ramakrishna Pillai who had recently lost his first wife had been encouraged by friends to meet Kalyani Amma. Yet in the four years that they knew each other prior to marriage, they conducted largely an epistolary relationship with each other, in an attempt to get to know each other. So in many ways, their relationship did not face the kind of opposition that Rosie's and CJ's did. Unlike lovers in the early Malayalam novels, or Kalyani Amma and Ramakrishna Pillai, the Thomas's relationship faced enormous difficulties. Rosie recounts this period, with some bitterness:

> A man and a woman are meant to share an equal responsibility in love, isn't it. Anyway, I learnt that CJ took on the entire burden of responsibility for this [their relationship] and spoke to my father. I also did not back off. I let it be known that I was the one who had encouraged CJ, and stopped him from quitting

> Paul's college and leaving forever [after they fell in love]. Oh God! The rest is best left unsaid! All possible opposition, tears, taunts, attempts to change my mind, sobs from the depths of the heart [her parents]; all of it drove me mad…I remember with pain and a sense of guilt that my friend [CJ] who had never lowered his head before anyone in his life had now not only to bend his head, but literally his backbone before my family.[17]

The impediments before Rosie and CJ Thomas were immense and seemingly unending. Theirs was a marriage that was greatly opposed, especially by her family. This was in part induced by denominational differences (she was a Catholic and he a Jacobite), as much as a sense of loss of family honour and prestige. For 1940s Kerala a love affair of their kind was as scandalous as it was novel and radical. Delicately, Rosie weaves complex emotions into an intricate narrative. Respect turns to love; love blends with desire; and love for them was a fine balance of the erotic and the emotional. For both of them, their love is at once a moment of defiance as of self-definition. To marry the man she loves despite parental opposition strengthens Rosie's faith in herself; he on the contrary complies with her family's demands in entirety in order to gain the woman he loves. One of these was to convert to Catholicism (in his case this was particularly harsh as it was well known that he had distanced himself from the church because of his political beliefs). The description of this ritual reveals in harrowing detail not simply the humiliation that they had to suffer in the name of love, but also the stranglehold of tradition kept alive through the multiple manipulations of family and kinship laws and community values. The "recanting" demanded of CJ Thomas hinged on his public disavowal of his political, religious and literary views. Love, illicit and immoral though it was as an activity, could be redeemed only through marriage. But for marriage to be acceptable it needed the sanction of family and community, which could even involve personal erasure and loss of selfhood, of the kind demanded of CJ Thomas. This early experience clearly intensified their subsequent conjugal life, which was kept alive through desire, dreams and shared difficulties. However, this conjugality was made possible only through a compromise with family and community. In Kerala (and in India generally) the nuclear family never emerged really as an ideological alternative to the patriarchal household; on the contrary it managed to find a niche for itself amongst several older forms of the family.

REVELATION

Like Victorian maidens,[18] heroines of Malayalam novels identified almost completely with the men they loved. This identification was manifest through dreams and delirium, which was also the time that they revealed their love in public, in the form of speech. Dreaming allowed Malayali women to cry out aloud for their loved ones, blending romantic love with erotic desire. Moreover it allowed them to speak of their love. Men on the other hand do not seem to have such outbursts of passion, nor do they appear to share their love, or sorrow with anyone. Love is a personal matter for men – to be carried out and reflected upon in private.

Needless to say, for women too speaking of love is not a free or a public activity. For the most part they may feel it, emote it, or displace it, but very rarely state it, especially to the object of one's love. Even in *Indulekha*, which probably has the most direct addressing of this issue, they do not confess their love to each other head on but only allude to it indirectly. "Indulekha did not let [Madhavan] know at that time lest it should affect his studies adversely. Madhavan did not let [her] know because he was quite shy and felt afraid that he would not be able to do it. There was good reason for Madhavan to feel this. Indulekha was renowned beauty in all of Malayalam [Kerala]".[19] The only time that Madhavan and Indulekha speak to each other about their love for each other, it becomes an occasion for exploring the social and sexual practices of Kerala:

> *Indulekha* [in a playful manner]: Fine, allright, you may love me so much but what if I did not love you back? Will I still be dear to you?
> *Madhavan*: I will never believe that you did care for me.
> *Indulekha*: Then what is the problem?
> *Madhavan*: – Problem?
> *Indulekha*: Yes, tell me what the problem is then.
> *Madhavan*: Allright, I will tell you what I think the reason for this problem is. Firstly, you think that I still have not achieved a position. Secondly, you know that many rich and powerful men desire you.
> *Indulekha*: I never thought that you were so low until now. If I was crazy about one of these rich men who so desire me, could I not have married one of them by now. I am appalled at this nonsense. In this matter gold and grass are the same to me. I have decided that I shall marry only that man whom my heart desires.
> *Madhavan*: Have you found any such person until now?
> *Indulekha*: Even if there is such a person why should I tell such a despicable person as you?
> *Madhavan*: Why are you castigating me? Do I need this too?
> *Indulekha*: Enough, enough, you are a fine one. You know that I care for you. Yet you think that because kings and rich men desire me I shall go against my heart and desire and accept one of them, isn't it? Pathetic! How could you should be so unintelligent. Terrible! You think of me as such a fickle woman. If that is the case, why did you care for me so much?[20]

This leads to a long debate between them on the nature of Nayar mariliny and whether Nayar women were capable of monogamous unions.[21] Suffice it to say here that love had to be conveyed indirectly, through deed and gesture. And when actually addressed, love was always articulated in the language of marriage. Indulekha confesses her love to Madhavan finally by telling him that she had chosen him mentally as her husband two years ago and ever since had neither loved nor desired another.[22]

In contrast one has the silent, troubled love of Subhadra in *Martanda Varma*, which finds recognition only at the moment of her death. Subhadra is one of the most unusual characters in Malayalam literature in this period. Abandoned by her husband because he doubts her fidelity, Subhadra is a lovely and feisty woman. Desired by the very men who despise her wit and independence, she toys with them, but never succumbs to their overtures. Nor does she treat any of the malicious remarks about her character with anything less than lofty disdain. At the same time, she is the perfect embodiment of friendship – providing emotional succour to her lovelorn friend Parukutty and political ally to the prince Martanda Varma. Though she supports Parukutty through her many hours of sorrow, and saves her from mortal threats, in turn she never chooses to confide in Parukutty her own closely guarded grief. It is only as she lies dying from her uncle's vicious attack at the end of the novel that her husband, who had abandoned her, realizes his mistake and rushes back in an attempt to rescue her:

> Even as these frightful words were uttered, the door he had bolted was kicked open and a frantic figure jumped into the room crying, "Don't…for God's sake, don't! The sound of his voice and the sight of his face (although the latter had changed considerably within the past years) sent a thrill of delight through Subhadra, and she whispered her thanks to God for having answered her prayer before it was too late, 'Oh! God! I can die in peace now!' In that instant the sword fell upon her neck, and with blood pouring out of her half-severed head she fell upon the ground, calling upon her dead mother. The stranger who had come in, a second too late to avert the tragedy, threw down his sword and kneeling by the side of the girl he had deserted long ago, cried in agony, 'Oh! God! My love! My darling! Ah! Wretched man! You who have committed one crime already…take my life also…for having deserted this poor girl unjustly!' Subhadra made an effort to speak. 'Live…live! She whispered, her voice choked with blood.'…. Be true at least to that poor Fatima".[23]

Not once in the novel is the identity of Bahrim Khan as Subhadra's husband directly alluded too. Revelation in *Martanda Varma* is not simply the moment of directly acknowledging love; it is also slowly unravelling the swathes of silence and subterfuge around the identity of the object of one's love (this is true in the case of Ananthapadmanabhan too who appears throughout the novel in different guises). Love, like one's name, is a specific and individual identity. The moment of revelation addresses this identity; it also holds the potential for transforming an attraction through the acts of naming, recognition and acknowledgement into real love.

While the novels of this period do not explore love in the context of relationships, it is precisely this transformation that is central to the autobiographical enterprise. Rosie Thomas remembers that the very first time she and CJ walked back home together in the evening, she was petrified that it would create a scandal:

> I and CJ walked on either side of the path. I was very worried. What would people think if they saw [us]? CJ understood my restlessness I think. "Look carefully and walk. There may be something on the fence – don't stick so close to it" [he said]. "My dearest. I love you more than my life itself". The words screamed in my heart. But would not come out. Instead I said, "There will be dinner for you at home, won't there?" "Dinner?" 'Then what does my sweetie want – my heart?' – I thought, but instead I said, "Greedy people like me need dinner, you must be eating honey or something!" CJ walked on without speaking. We got to my doorstep. "Good night". I ran up the steps, panting slightly. When

> CJ approached me I was very astonished. He had never come home when there were no elders around. A mango tree in the yard spread its leaves. It was a moonlit night I remember. The branches of the tree cast a spreading shadow all around…. "Girl"! He held his arms out towards me. I fell into those outstretched arms without a thought. CJ kissed me like a madman. Moments sped past. Suddenly remembering the surrounding, CJ walked towards the road. We could never go back to the pretence of the past.[24]

Autobiographical memory is always about an inner life, progressively changing through every act of unfolding. Love, once revealed, moved forward like life itself. Love and life were both measurable by time, and it was time that became the test of its endurance.

BODY

Love, which women in novels bore within them as a secret betrothal, is then experienced as a painful yearning in the long periods of absence and loneliness that mark their relationships. In all three novels the experience of absence as loneliness or longing has a specifically gendered dimension. Women, for the most part, live in secluded domestic spaces and love for them becomes akin to agony. This isolation can drive them to heartbroken prostration (Indulekha), a self-imposed exile (Lakshmi) or tears, listlessness and ennui (Parukutty). Love as a bodily experience of sorrow for women is also linked to their almost complete exclusion from the public sphere. The gendering of opportunities is intimately linked to the way in which men and women learn how to love. Stuck indoors in segregated spaces for long stretches of their life, love begins to be articulated both through such bodily expressions, while it also accentuates their loneliness. Parukutty, Indulekha and Lakshmi are all women abandoned, in a sense, by the men they love, though the circumstances are different. While all of them find their situation painful and unbearable, none of them is ever enraged by it. Nor do they possess the agency to transform the conditions of their existence (Lakshmi is the only one who attempts to do so against great odds). Their bodies begin to bear the marks of the loneliness that they face. Lakshmi develops fever, Indulekha takes to bed and Parukutty is afflicted by uncontrollable tearfulness and intense sorrow, especially as she has been informed that her loved one is long dead.

Bodies are equally the markers of desire and yearning. Especially prior to revelation, love and desire could drive a person to distraction. Yet while women bore their secrets stoically (Subhadra), or as an act of faith (Indulekha), men were more prone to suspicion (Subhadra's husband, aka Bihram Khan) and enraged confusion (Madhavan):

> Madhavan's heart was seething because of his constant thoughts about Indulekha. One night he lay down to sleep; yet sleep eluded him. As he lay thus it struck him: 'Why am I sorrowing like this? If Indulekha had loved me she would have been my wife so much earlier than this. She may be fond of me; I doubt if she loves me. In any case she herself knows that so many worthier than me desire her so she must want to, after mutually committing their hearts to each other,

> live as husband and wife with one of them. How can one know a woman's heart? However much a woman is educated it is woman's character isn't it? Then why I am sad unnecessarily? Now I will not burn my heart out over Indulekha – that is certain. I should take my guns and go for a hunt [*shikar*] in the morning. Father may also come. It's a long time since I have been on a hunt. This mental sorrow has nearly ruined my manliness. It should never be so…I shall never torment my heart like this again.[25]

Madhavan's heart burns with desire and despair. He wants Indulekha, yet is not sure whether she has rejected him without ever considering him as a possible lover. What tore him was not simply unrequited love, or a sense of outrage, but the fear that he had lost his "manliness" in the madness of love. For every hour that he had spent in private playing chess or the piano with Indulekha he wanted now to compensate with hectic, outdoor activity that would restore his faith in himself as a man. It is significant that in this activity he wishes to be accompanied by his father. In the search for manliness within matriliny, what could be a more significant contract than the one with the father?

Unlike in nineteenth century romantic fiction, desire in real life was not devoid of sexuality. This had its moments of excitement as indeed of sorrow. *Ivan Enttee Priya CJ* is more bold and personal than *Vyazhavatta Smaranakal*. It explores their life, with its erotic intimacies, financial traumas and the creative excitements of a life of literary and artistic activity with equal ease. By blurring the boundaries between private and public, Rosie Thomas creates a particular style of remembering that is unique for autobiographies of her generation. Equally, she captures through her particular tone and idiom the joy and playfulness that had been a part of their life together. Love and marriage here are enjoyable, and their memory one to be savoured. Her vivid, humorous and moving descriptions of marital desire brings alive the meaning of sexuality for people in love:

> That night there were no thoughtless[26] old men to trouble us [this is a reference to their wedding night when they had to sleep apart as there was no custom amongst Catholics for a newly wed couple to spend the night together]. We flew off to a heaven that was ours alone. The perfume of the young blossoms of the moonlit mango tree filled the air. I can remember what CJ whispered in my ear that night, "Grasshopper [*patchakudire*]! I am a 32 year old man sleeping with a girl for the first time. I used to feel so much lust on seeing you, yet I suffered too for having had such feelings. An endless feeling of guilt. I used to see you like a goddess. Oh! We are finally husband and wife".

Ivan Enttee Priya CJ knits together not merely such joyful memories of sexuality and desire but also those underwritten by a deep sense of loss, with consummate ease. CJ Thomas died young, of brain cancer. At the end of a short, intense and loving life, his death created a painful void in Rosie's life. The memory of one of their last nights together is recounted with poignancy:

> That night too CJ went to bed before ten at night. He felt a little cool [to the touch]. Normally I used to cover him with a blanket and leave. That day I just kissed him on the cheek. His tears had made it salty. "I have lost the ability to be a husband". When he said that that's when I realized the truth of what CJ had wanted to tell me for a while but had been unable to. "Oh that does not matter. We lived like that all this while. Now we will live like a brother and sister". I could say this much with conviction. CJ clung to me like a small baby...[27]

SUBJECTIVITY

In a curious way it was love that made people into modern subjects. The early Malayalam novel offers a variety of articulations of this idea. It is at once a personal pledge between two people, and a public statement of difference. *Indulekha* which is the best example of this duality, offers one several subject positions of women who are in, or forced into, sexual/marital relations with men they do not love. Love here represents an individual choice as opposed to normative practice (her mother who has a Nambudiri *sambandham*) or social command (her cousin who is pushed into a *sambandham* with Suri Nambudiri after Indulekha turns him down). It is the choice of love that frees one from the bondage of society. Yet love, despite its destabilizing quality, does not seem to be ultimately transgressive, or able to disrupt the existing social order. In fact, it seems more like a 'choice' sanctioned by society, where members of the family seem to be arraying themselves to cheer the young couple on. Second, even though the act of choosing one's life partner is a mark of modernity, it is significant that there is a marked ambivalence in the gendering of the modern loving subject. Once in love, the modern woman becomes the perfect embodiment of traditional virtue, with the added virtue of possessing a few modern skills. The new knowledge, born of the colonial encounter that seemed to be threatening the old social order did not (as yet) transform women's subjectivity. A virtuous woman was adorned by her modernity as a fresh accomplishment that accentuated her traditional femininity.

English education for women is an example of how unclear it was what modern life entailed for women. Indulekha, Lakshmi and Padmavati[28] are all "English educated', yet it is not clear what exactly they read in English. Their skill in Malayalam, Manipravalam and Sanskrit, which they handled with an equal amount of ease, is more explicit. In fact, Indulekha or Subhadra's wit and intelligence sprang from their being rooted within a Malayali culture. "English education" then is a gloss that affects only their emotional desires; it is not translated into intellectual accomplishments.

In contrast, in the cases of both Kalyani Amma and Rosie Thomas, education enabled them not only to share common interests with their husbands, but in Kalyani Amma's case, to pursue a career as a teacher. In their case it was she who undertook the financial management of the family and without her job, they could never have survived. In addition, she continued her higher studies, and her own literary pursuits throughout their married life. From the decision to accompany her husband after exile, much to the consternation of her family and friends who hoped that she might convince him to apologize, to those of how to manage their family life, she displayed an enormous degree of autonomy. This she attributes to the enormous degree of love that they shared.

On the contrary, love within the nineteenth century novels seems to make women weak and indecisive. Lakshmi (*Lakshmi Keshavam*) is the exception here. She decides to go in search of the man she loves. It is interesting to contrast the tropes of travel in the case of Madhavan (in *Indulekha*) and Lakshmi (in *Lakshmi Keshavam*). While the former's is a journey of self-exploration, the latter's is literally a quest for the 'other'. In Madhavan's case, it is journeying to forget; in Lakshmi's, it is to regain a lost, or distant, love. Madhavan's journey, though unknown to his family, is with the full knowledge of his benevolent and supportive English employer. He has tickets, money and addresses of people to meet in Calcutta (where he is travelling to). In Lakshmi's case, she has to travel incognita, with some money that she has borrowed without prior permission from her family. While both are robbed during their journey, the implications of this are different for Madhavan and Lakshmi. Each encounter – be it as absurd as the tiger in Calcutta zoo or the robbery on the train, wins Madhavan friends or highlights his valour. In Lakshmi's case, each obstacle that she encounters en route to her destination (Mysore) – loss of money, the death of her friend, missing her train and finally near-rape by a Pathan – makes her more vulnerable, and emphasizes her femininity as defenceless. So even as both are beset by difficulties, it is significant that these become moments for accentuating gender differences. In fact travel seems to be the space of consolidating the differences that separate the worlds of men and women – professional, financial and personal. And even as travel becomes a journey of self-discovery for Madhavan, for Lakshmi it is something that does not inflect her self-definition in any meaningful sense.

While Rosie Thomas may not have had paid employment (CJ did not want her to work) or a great deal of independent mobility, this did not affect the degree of autonomy she exercised within the marriage. Whether it was the domestic economy, children's upbringing or the reconstruction of the house it was she who took the critical decisions. In addition, she also shared very closely the intellectual and artistic pursuits of her husband. She was clearly an equal participant in the discussions on art, creativity and politics that took place in their home, which explains her ability to write about this with ease and clarity.

EPILOGUE

How does one understand the changing history and representation of an emotion like love in Kerala? While in the west, the changes over the two centuries led to the emergence of families based on affection, in Kerala (and India) it would be hard to say that a similar change has taken place. Families do change, but this is not the result of the coming together of companionate marriage and a demand for privacy.[29] Heterosexual love does not become the bond that forges new familial sentiment; on the contrary, familial love continues to be based on age and generation, duty and obligation. Families in Kerala based on monogamous marriage, shared resources and co-residence are not abstracted from wider kin networks in the way in which modern families are in the West. In fact, marriage continues to be controlled and arranged by older kin. Yet, the difference by the latter half of the twentieth century was people did fall in love and get married, though it was never considered a necessary prerequisite. Affinity did not lead to the emergence of families based on affection.

The history of fictional and autobiographical literature suggests that modernity brought with it new notions of selfhood and subjectivity. Often this is manifested in the coming together of two master narratives – one dealing with the ideal of romantic love and the other of a "truer life".[30] History, writing and experience begin to find voice in similar ways, where past, present and future are linked through a set of events, and an emphasis on causality that acts as the explanatory mechanism. The structural elements and social concerns that animate the novel or the autobiography then are constituted by shared codes. It is not so much about a distinction between fiction and factuality, as creating a "culture of love". In the changing lives of modern Malayalis, this modern moment is fractured and produces a variety of different possibilities. While writing, be it the novel or the autobiography, represents a growing sense of self, loving, as a part of cultural self-expression does not yet become normative. Both the early novel and the women's autobiography point towards a growing sensibility about love not simply as fantasy, but as the right of an individual. Yet in a society where the individual was still struggling against the stranglehold of kinship and community norms, love still held the promise of a delicious transgression.

By the 1950s, Kerala society witnessed yet another powerful ideological shift – the growth of socialism, which brought in its wake new ideas of friendship and love. Thoppil Bhasi's *Ningel Ennee Communist Aakki* [You made me a communist, 1954] is one of the best examples of these new ideas within a socialist imagination, contingent as they were on the idea of *sakhav* or comrade. Bhasi was one of the central figures involved in communist party propaganda, and his plays were written as a part of the early communist party's cultural agenda. Yet the tremendous popularity of his plays in the 1950s were testimony to the fact that the issues he was dealing with were close to people's hearts. These plays were closer to popular theatrical forms, rather than formal proscenium theatre, and were performed throughout Kerala. Combining simple dialogue with memorable songs, these plays probably did more for the popularity of Party politics than the more elaborate analysis ever did.

Ningel Ennee Communist Aakki is interesting as Bhasi is attempting to address revolutionary transformation as a "battle on two fronts".[31] The one in the public was a revolt against class oppression; the other in private at home was the battle against patriarchal power, in both its age and gender related dimensions. At the heart of the play are two fathers – Paramu Pillai and Keshavan Nayar who symbolize the two sides of patriarchal power. Paramu Pillai is hot tempered and authoritarian; yet he loves his family like a benevolent patriarch. Keshavan Nayar is the brutal landlord, cruel to his daughter, dependants and workers alike. Paramu Pillai's son Gopalan is a communist party activist, who writes fiery speeches and revolutionary songs. Sumam, Keshavan Nayar's daughter falls in love with Gopalan after hearing the songs and decides to join Party activities. The Party becomes the space where people can be "comrades", abstracted from the binds of family, caste or community. As comrades, Gopalan and Mathew share common cause with the untouchable Pulaya labourers Karamban and his daughter Mala, and Sumam can find refuge from an oppresive home environment. Friendship or comradeship here is the vision of *equality* that enables castes, communities, men and women to come together. Gopalan and Mathew spend a large part of their time with Mala and Karamban in their hut thereby transforming a "polluted" space into a space of unmarked freedom and camaraderie. Both Mala and Sumam go for Party meetings; this frees Mala from the fetters of caste oppression, and for both of them it gives a sense of political subjectivity that was hitherto unavailable to women. Both, it so transpires, are in love with Gopalan.

The projected world of socialist equality within Bhasi's play is very different from the world of the nineteenth century novel. Here love and struggle go on together – Mathew reminds Gopalan that he was not "attentive" to the need to carry on the revolutionary struggle on both fronts – at home (with reference to Sumam being beaten by her father) and in the outside world. Despite the dream space of equality being available in the Party and in its village level organs, Gopalan is worried about being linked publicly with Sumam as it might cast aspersions on the movement. He does not want "communist" activity to be denounced as immoral and bohemian. It is interesting that this was the very charge that was brought against CJ Thomas in real life, for which he was willing to risk every principle and negotiate acceptable terms with Rosie's family's, and the Christian community's norms. The communist party's public political face in Kerala [and India] was very much in keeping with conventional morality, extending it to govern the private lives of its members.

Friendship – as comradeship – is an erasure of difference and a possibility of entering a world of equality based on ideology and labour. However, when friendship turns to love it becomes, at best a disease – *sukhakeda* or weakness – *durbalam*; at worst something truly worrisome. While Sumam and Gopalan's love holds the potential for "disgracing" the Party (according to Gopalan) both of them want it. Sumam who has been radicalized by Party activity, admires Gopalan for his fiery speeches and radical songs. She herself becomes involved in political organization and takes to singing and marching on the streets. Despite the liberating potential of love, she is unable to call Gopalan by his name. In a moment of playful tenderness he says to her, "call me comrade at least".[32] Here too the projected future is marriage but the lived reality is the common ground of emancipatory revolutionary activity. It is this revolutionary companionateness that would finally enable a critical transformation of the feudal family structure. It is ironic that while many men closely involved with the Party, and influenced by left wing ideology like CJ Thomas actually loathed women activists, Gopalan and Mathew welcome them. Comradeship creates an undifferentiated world – one where all were to be welcome and each one has an equal place.

It is Mala's love for Gopalan that becomes the truly transgressive moment and possesses a truly transformatory potential. And it is precisely the fear of this transformation that makes Mathew ask her to hide it. His argument was that it is unrequited; therefore even as he gives her dignity as a member of the revolutionary struggle (and thus shorn of caste identity) he asks her not to demand a love that would not be returned. Gopalan who thinks of her as his sister discovers that Mala loves him, and despite his unease (his not loving her in 'that' way) wants to marry her. However, this is averted in the nick of time and Gopalan and Sumam are restored to each other. It is the unstated subtext of love as the true leveller of caste difference that provides for the tension within Bhasi's text. While he opts for the safer resolution, it goes to the heart of inequality and discrimination in Kerala.

The 1940s, 1950s and 1960s witnessed changes in the cultural ambience in all kinds of different ways. The older family structures were changing quite rapidly; this was aided to a large extent by the growth of a non-agrarian urban economy. Politically, caste and nationalist politics had challenged many of the segregationist and sectarian tendencies in Kerala society. The growth of the Communist Party, especially in its early period, brought with it dreams of equality and transformation. Marriages, such as those of CJ and Rosie Thomas were definitely more common by this period, though these were not the result of a Party mandate. While the Party was possibly resistant to formulating a really radical critique of the family, it created alternative visions about individuals and the organization of private life.

These are merely glimpses of different moments in the social history of emotions in a very complex historical context. In retrospect, it would not be wrong to say that it was the changes in the private sphere from the late nineteenth century, initiated by new forms of literary imagination that made romantic love a reasonably acceptable emotion in Kerala. However, despite its multiple mediations, including socialist dreams, marriage based on such love did not translate necessarily into relationships based on equality and mutual respect.

NOTES

1. See G. Arunima, 'Allies, confidantes and beloveds: representations of ideas of friendship in nineteenth century Kerala', in Patel, Bagchi and Krishna Raj (eds)., *Thinking Social Science in India: Essays in Honour of Alice Thorner*, New Delhi: Sage, 2002, pp. 282–296.
2. See Peter Gay, *The Bourgeois Experience: Victoria to Freud. Volume II: The Tender Passion*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1986, for one of the most nuanced histories of these notions.
3. Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 288.
4. Ibid.
5. In the period where the early Malayalam novel was beginning to find its feet, Bengali writers like Bankimchandra Chatterji and Rabindranath Tagore were exploring the complexities of conjugal relationships and family life. See Sambuddha Chakrabarti, 'Changing notions of conjugal relations in nineteenth century Bengal', in Rajat Kanta Ray (ed.), *Mind, Body and Society: Life and Mentality in Colonial Bengal*, Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1995, pp. 297–330, as a case in point.
6. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, pp. 288–290.
7. Pat Jalland, *Women, Marriage and Politics:1860-1914*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.
8. Potheri Kunhabu, Indyayil Britishkarude Vazhchayum Athintte Apariharyamaya Oru Phalavum [British Rule in India and one of its Unresolved Results]. *Bhashaposhini*, Book II, Part 4, 1897.

9. K. Gomathi Amma, *Dhanya Aayi Jnaan* [I am blessed], Kottayam: D.C. Books, 1979, pp. 75–122.
10. See John Jervis's development of Jurgen Habermas's idea of the private sphere, *in Exploring the Modern: Patterns of Western Culture and Civilization*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1998, pp. 152–153.
11. B. Kalyani Amma, *Vyazhavatta Smaranakal* [Memories of a Twelve Year Interlude], Trichur: Current Books, 1958, p. 51.
12. Ibid.
13. Gomathi Amma, *Dhanya Aayi Jnaan*, p. 78.
14. Ibid.
15. See George Irumbayam's Introduction, *Nalu Novelukal* [Four Novels], Trichur: Kerala Sahitya Akademi, 1985, p. 24.
16. K. Padoo Menon, *Lakshmi Keshavam*, included in *Nalu Novelukal*, p. 148.
17. Rosie Thomas, *Ivan Entte Priya CJ* [He, My Dear CJ] Kottayam: D.C. Books, 1997, pp. 19–20.
18. Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Love: Victorians to Moderns*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992, p. 281.
19. O. Chandu Menon, *Indulekha*, Kottayam: D.C. Books, 1993, p. 26.
20. Chandu Menon, *Indulekha*, pp. 42–43.
21. See G. Arunima, *There Comes Papa: Colonialism and the Transformation of Matriliny in Kerala, Malabar, 1850-1940*. Orient Longman, for a longer discussion of this issue.
22. Chandu Menon, *Indulekha*, p. 49.
23. C.V. Raman Pillai, *Martanda Varma*, trans from Malayalam by B.K. Menon, New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1998, pp. 378–379.
24. Rosie Thomas, *Ivan*, pp. 14–15.
25. Chandu Menon, *Indulekha*, pp. 38–39.
26. Rosie Thomas, *Ivan*, p. 42.
27. Ibid., pp. 120–121.
28. V.T. Shankunni Menon, *Padmavati*, Calicut, 1920.
29. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 291.
30. See Tomi Suzuki, *Narrating the Self: Fictions of Japanese Modernity*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996, for a discussion of the "I-novel" or autobiographical fiction in Japan for a sensitive exploration of the problem.
31. Thoppil Bhasi, *Ningel Ennee Communist Aakki* [You Made me a Communist], Trivandrum: Prabhat, 1984.
32. Ibid., p. 139.

CHAPTER 8

Violent Acts: Cultures, Structures and Retraditionalisation

Kumkum Sangari

The violation of a woman's person, her mental or physical integrity and her freedom of movement through individual or collective acts crosses all boundaries of class and nation, yet the forms of violence are both context determined and historically specific. They present the difficulty of finding a path which can avoid a psychological universalism in which violent acts stem from human 'nature', as well as a culturalism that calls them religion-driven third world pathologies. The difficulty is compounded by the way 'culturalist' definitions of patriarchal violence either redeem it as sacred tradition or condemn it in the old colonial language. This complicates feminist attempts to critique violent practices, especially since culturalist accounts tend to spectacularise and decontextualise violent acts. Culturalist accounts conflate religions and patriarchies with culture, and are unable to explain similar practices among different religious groups. And here the approvals of fascinated orientalisms are as significant as the demonisation of religions. Indeed the two have had a supportive and complementary history from the colonial period, in which sacralising violence went hand in hand with condemning it in shrill voices of white superiority that spoke in the name of Reason.

As cliterodectomy is to North Africa, or 'honour' killings to the so-called Islamic countries, so 'sati' is to South Asia (and sometimes South-East Asia). Despite feminist efforts to situate these practices, they are repeatedly returned to a neo-orientalist gaze, a gaze that also generates its own retraditionalising contexts. Here is the opening page of Catherine Weinberger-Thomas' book on widow immolation in India, the subtitle reads, 'A burning in Bali':

> It is in outer India, on the most distant marches of Hinduism, that the scene paradoxically will be set – a *macabre yet dazzling* scene to which the reader will have to adjust *his* vision and above all *his* sensitivity if *he* is to follow *us* in *our* exploration of *a cultural enigma* in which *blinding darkness merges with blinding light.* Here *we* are inviting *him* to *embark on the discovery of extraordinary aspects of feminine life, or rather of the voluntary death of women;* of certain categories of women known

> in India as satis. These are women who *burn themselves alive* on their husband's funeral pyres in a rite also known (erroneously, in fact) as sati.
>
> These things shock us. They fill us with indignation and horror. Yet Indian tradition exalts them and *the Hindu orthodoxy hold them to be eminently prestigious, nay, one of the defining features of its identity.* It is only through our concerted attention to them, as we work our way through a maze of texts, images and forms of worship, that *the opacity of these facts will give way to transparency: like the contours of the night, they must be intuited before they can be apprehended. By way of preparing the reader for this exile from the familiar, we begin by casting him upon the shore of the exotic* as we transport him to the small kingdom of Badung, in the south of Bali.
>
> It is 1829. The witness, Pierre Dubois, is himself worth the trip.[1]

The tired and distressingly familiar metaphors – the darkly enigmatic feminised orient, the light-bearing self-pluralising researcher, the contemporary male 'western' reader cast as a natural successor of the colonial traveller and his voyage of so-called discovery, the fascinated spectatorial gaze – are centred, in the account that follows, on the assumption of the 'voluntary' death of women. For her widow immolation is a consensual form of sacrifice that occurs with the woman's consent (a subject to which I will return).

Weinberger-Thomas' book could be dismissed for its bathos and its predictability (most elements of her argument can be found in bits and pieces elsewhere), but for the fact that it represents a reactionary and interventionist neo-orientalism, and the embarrassingly precise coincidence of its conclusions with the claims of sati supporters (another subject to which I will return). As such it is a useful, though not a necessary starting point, to discuss the relation between violence and culture. The book builds a deliberately de-specified ritual narrative (drawn from a variety of centuries, contexts and sources), and turns it into an enveloping ahistorical penumbra. A determined authorial will to power sets out to displace all other explanations with the force of ritual – yet neither the 'sati' nor the native practitioners and worshippers understand the meaning of these rituals. The ignorant natives intuit, the Indologist explicates. For instance, it seems that because Om Kunwar circled the corpse four times, she did 'quite unbeknownst to her, come very close to the true spirit of the custom'. Little known notions are said to be 'unconscious stimuli' and to 'continue to subsist in the symbolic realm'.[2] The ritual universe is thus constructed as a religio-cultural 'unconscious', and also as synchronic.

Weinberger-Thomas accuses secular and feminist critiques of widow immolation of not giving enough credit to belief systems, of demystifying 'sati' by introducing material interests and naming it a murder, and consigns them/us to the hell of 'historical exteriority'.

Are religion and rituals (of self-sacrifice, self mutilation) then, the most pertinent contexts for widow immolation? Does being 'inside' a culture mean inhabiting its secular and political spaces or only its ritual or religious ones? Perhaps such culturalist defences and explanations of violence need to be questioned as much as culturalist condemnations of violence against women. The nature and distribution of violence against women in

India challenges the distinction between sacralised and non-sacralised violence, the division between one's 'own' women and 'other' women, and even between forms of violence. Perhaps the discernible pattern and structure of violent acts can be enlisted to unravel these dichotomies and define the specificity of this conjuncture.

I

Broadly speaking, violence is a foundational and systemic feature of all contemporary patriarchies. Women's consent to patriarchies is often an effect of the anticipation of violence, or the guarantee of violence in the last instance – to ensure obedience, inculcate submission, punish transgression. Patriarchies rest equally on consent by women, violence against women and on legitimating ideologies. The fact that there is no full male monopoly of institutional and interpersonal violence, that women can be active agents in inciting and inflicting violence, suggests the obvious: that patriarchies are not the rule of men over women but systemic structures. Indeed, patriarchies work to undermine solidarities by dividing women within the same family, neighbourhood, caste or class as well as across classes, castes and religions.

In India, violence against women works along the grain of social divisions, encashes and reinforces existing divisions, and is a crucial part of the emergence of new social tensions. If patriarchal systems are seen as structurally related to other axes of social division, rather than as autonomous or self-sustaining or epiphenomenal, then violence can be understood, at one level, as a connective tissue between patriarchal systems and other social structures: as a volatile node of containment, socialisation, status quoism, backlash or rearguard action against change and assertion by women. All the main offenders – class, caste, family, so-called religious community, state – are caught in these logics.

Violence against women is inescapably related to material considerations: control of the reproductive body and control of fertility, uneven distribution of labour and resources, exploitative production relations, the articulation of caste with class, and the logics of uneven spread of capitalism. The unevenness of capitalism and the transnational reformulation of patriarchies produced colonial patriarchal intersections from at least the nineteenth century. Older forms of violence acquired new shapes and new forms of violence appeared – a process that continues today with new inequalities produced by the accommodation of the national economy to global imperatives.

If I were to inventory the prevailing forms of violence against women in India – rape and other forms of sexual assault directed at women from the same class and at women from lower classes and castes; violence within the family that takes the shape of wife-battering, sex-selective abortion, harassment of daughters-in-law for dowry, the punishment of daughters for rightful claims to property, for the choice of a marriage partner, for sexual 'truancy' or for breaking the heterosexual norm; violence by family, village, caste councils or communal organisations to prevent or punish inter-caste or inter-religious marriage; state violence by the army and the police as in custodial gang rape, and in the doubled violations of rape trials and legal judgements – then some startling correspondences emerge. I will analyse these correspondences after some discussion of each kind of violence.

II

Sexual violence in the form of harassment, molestation and rape is both lateral, that is, directed at girl children and women of (apparently) the same class, and vertical, that is, directed at women 'below'. Both forms of violence are often committed by proximate or familiar persons, and can involve more than one aggressor and varying degrees of premeditation. Pockets of public indifference or acceptance are created by putting the onus on women's provocation. Even the judiciary has held women as partly responsible for the violence they experience: a woman's dress, behaviour and bold or 'provocative' nature has been said to trigger violence in men.[3] The significant thing to note is how often women of the *same* class are singled out as 'other' women by virtue of their dress, behaviour, nature and 'westernisation'.

Vertical violence, as in sexual assaults on tribal or Dalit women, is directed at women 'below'. It is based on blatant class and caste inequality and involves material issues of property and labour. This often takes the form of gang rapes by higher class/caste men. Poor lower caste women have been punished in their own right – for being too assertive, for dressing well or above their station,[4] for demanding higher wages, for claiming their right to land or claiming the piece of land that legally belongs to them, for defending their piece of land or refusing to sell it and for becoming agents of social transformation. They have also been treated as metonyms for their caste group. Lower caste women have been publicly shamed, paraded naked or raped by upper or intermediary caste landowners to punish Dalit men as a group. Women are identified with the caste group and the 'manhood' of a caste is defined by the degree of control men exercise over women and the passivity of their women.[5] Gang rape is a group crime, and the stripping and parading of women are collective, public and publicly witnessed acts of violence in which higher caste women have at times been actively complicit. The husband and relatives of the women are often forced to watch helplessly, yet their testimonies are discredited on the ground of passive 'consent'. The testimony of assaulted Dalit women is also discredited; they are represented as unreliable witnesses, liars, innately immoral and sexually promiscuous.

In village Bhateri, Bassi tehsil near Jaipur, Rajasthan, Bhanwari, a forty-year-old kumhar woman who worked as a saathin in the Women's Development Programme had actively taken up issues of literacy, water, health, wages, public distribution and rape for several years with support from her own village. When she became part of a government-led campaign against child marriage in 1992, she antagonised a highercaste landowning and politically powerful gujar family because she was seen as instrumental in preventing the marriage of their one-year-old daughter. The ensuing harassment of Bhanwari culminated in a gang rape in the presence of her husband, a rickshaw puller, who was immobilised and assaulted. Four of the five men belonged to a single gujar family in the same village, while one was a brahmin. After the rape, villagers either refused or did not dare to support her, she was accused of fabricating the story and publicly humiliated in a village meeting. In 1995, all the accused were acquitted of gang rape by the District and Sessions judge in Jaipur: her husband's testimony was discredited since he did not try to protect his wife, and the accused were let off because they were respectable, middle aged, and above all, upper caste men who would not defile themselves by touching a lower caste woman. The judiciary seemed to be unaware of the fact that lower caste women have for centuries been sexually exploited by upper caste men.[6] Bhanwari's case is extraordinary only because there is a full record of collusion of the police who initially refused to file an FIR and systematically substituted the evidence, the magistrate who delayed first the medical examination and then the arrests, the doctors who delayed the medical examination, the higher caste villagers who joined with local politicians and elected Panchayati Raj representatives in public demonstrations against her, and the court in its humiliating cross-examination, its refusal to admit a medical expert in the trial, in the way it cast aspersions on her character, and its conclusion that she was an unreliable witness: all of them maintained that she was lying, and this in the face of immense pressure from women's groups and publicity in the national media.

III

Family violence is the most daily and most normalised; it is directed laterally at a woman apparently within the same class. I say apparently, not only because there are de facto differences,[7] but because the techniques of domestic violence – in the denial of access to services, resources, food, medical aid and property as well as in the extraction of labour – are often intended to or have the effect of 'lowering' a woman's class and so of 'othering' her. Family violence is sanctioned by wider kinship networks, it is both spousal and non-spousal, and women can be involved in aggression. The involvement of women in violence against girls or other women in the family can be interpreted as a form of patriarchal delegation. Though often accompanied by allegations of unchastity, much of family violence is directly connected to material issues of property, inheritance, dowry, domestic work, survival labour and control of fertility. However, it cuts across class, caste and religion, and prevails in affluent families as well. It is not the widow alone who is vulnerable; taken as a totality, family violence seems to somewhat level the field among daughters, daughters-in-law, older wives and widows.[8] Older women, or those married for longer are abused more, that is, physical punishment can increase with the duration of the marriage.[9] In other words, the longevity of marriage does not guarantee 'belonging'; the possibility of being 'estranged' is always present.

Dowry related violence has involved long-term denials of access to support structures (being locked up) and family resources (food deprivation), and has taken the shape of forcible extraction of labour,[10] general ill treatment, beating and sexual assault. Most cases of dowry related violence occur within the frame of 'arranged' and so normative marriages, a very small percentage occur in love or inter-caste marriages. Even so, extramarital relations or the unchastity of the daughter-in-law is often alleged.[11]

Spouses, fathers-, brothers-, mothers- and sisters-in-law are implicated in dowry killings, usually by burning. In some cases even children have not been spared. In Kaliavas village, Rohtak district, Haryana, Sushma and her five-year-old daughter Preeti were pushed onto a heap of burning dung cakes.[12] The agony of a burning woman can be 'heard' and seen. A complicit marital family is unlikely to help her, and it is often neighbours who have interfered and assisted the woman.[13]

Natal families do not or are unable to provide much support for their married daughters in the majority of cases; sanctuary-seeking daughters are usually seen as financial and moral burdens, and sent back to their marital homes.[14] The natal family becomes the primary agent of violence when the violence is related to the regulation of sexuality, the enforcement of heterosexuality, the arrangement of marriage (as is visible both in the general abuse of girls and more particularly in cases of inter-caste or religious marriage), and the denial of a single woman's right to property.[15]

Sex-selective abortion of the female foetus is based on calculating the 'cost' of daughters. Women undertake sex-selective abortion under visible family pressure as well as appear to take the decision 'themselves'.[16] The legal onus for sex-selective abortion is on the woman: if she goes for the medical test herself and willingly, then she is considered responsible and punishable for the decision.[17] The involvement of women in sex-selective abortion hinges as much on the issue of patriarchal delegation of violence as on family, kin or caste group control – that is, social control – of the foetus. Such control of fertility should not, however, be confused with women's choice: women are also frequently denied choice regarding birth control and abortion. The family and its violence may perhaps be 'private' for middle class women but it is public for poor women. For instance, in urban slums, the whole neighbourhood is able to witness violence.[18] And these spectators can at times turn into instigators. What is more, many types of family violence fall within the ambit of group crimes when they entail more than one individual and some degree of planning and co-ordination.

IV

Violence related to inter-caste marriages has been conducted directly by male and female family members either alone or in tandem with caste or tribal panchayats and village elites, or on the mandate of both higher and lower caste panchayats, tribal panchayats and higher caste village elites. It is both lateral, directed against women of the same family and caste, and vertical, directed against lower caste women and men. This kind of violence targets both inter-caste unions, especially those between lower caste men and relatively higher caste girls, as well as intra-caste marriages which infringe prohibitory taboos on village endogamy and marriage between different gotras. Caste endogamy is related to the maintenance of the caste order, and structures both upper and lower caste patriarchies. At bottom, the issue is women's choice of partner and women who do choose are maligned as immoral or licentious. This kind of violence is collective, collaborative and usually public.

In cases of violence related to inter-marriage, at the very least erring couples have been forced to break the marriage and remarried to old men or socially boycotted; at worst, they have been killed – hacked, beheaded, burnt, hung. Even though the killings are usually publicly witnessed, there are few convictions for 'want of evidence', and the police is frequently complicit.[19]

The continuum, as well as collaboration, between family killings and caste council killings, and the sanction bestowed by public witness and the participation of villagers, deserve special attention.

In village Tohana in Fatehabad, near Hissar, in February 2002, a sikh couple confessed to beheading their teenage daughters, Veerpal and Manjeet, for bringing them 'a bad name'. The girls had eloped with their lovers but were caught.[20]

In village Khedakul, Narela, north Delhi, in April 1991, Poonam a jat girl was shot dead by her uncle with the full consent of her father for having an illicit relationship with another jat boy from the same village and several villagers were witness to the crime.[21]

In village Hendigara, district Hazaribagh, in June 1994, Mahavir Prasad, a low caste youth was lynched for marrying Malati, a kurmi girl. Malati was publicly beaten and stripped by men of her own caste. In this case the kurmi caste panchayat seems to have been more incensed by the girl's effrontery in choosing her partner than was her own father.[22]

In village Mehrana, western Uttar Pradesh, in March 1991, a jat girl Roshni ran away with Brijendra, a lower caste jatav boy; they were caught along with Brijendra's friend who had 'helped' them. The girl's family was denied any say in the matter. In accordance with the jat panchayat's decree, the three were tortured all night, hanged in the morning, then set on fire. The entire village witnessed this. A jat woman from the village called Roshni a slut (rand).[23]

Prem Chowdhry attributes the breaking of marriage codes by young couples and the reinforcement of marriage codes by caste councils, to a conflicted economic and status-related upward mobility, and to a reactive struggle by higher castes to retain status in the face of social and legal changes, such as increased property rights for women, that are making them insecure and eroding older status categories. Lower castes are denied any claim to 'honour' by the castes above, but they may, in a compensatory mode, defend and implement honour codes within their own caste.[24]

Obviously what is at stake is more than kinship bonds, the purity of caste, marriage codes and the 'honour' of the community: it is also the maintenance of social status, caste hierarchies and material inequalities, and an attempt by caste panchayats to cling on to power. Here existing local tensions[25] and power dynamics between caste groups play a role. For higher castes, the protection of caste hierarchies entails not only the violation of 'other' women, but also the violation or killing of women of the same caste. The situation of lower castes is similar. When upwardly mobile lower castes adopt higher caste practices to claim a hitherto 'denied' masculinity and 'protect' their own women from upper caste men (since de-masculinisation by upper caste men takes the form of exploiting lower caste women), then this can involve targetting their own women.

It would be a mistake to accept the representation of panchayat orchestrated killings as 'honour' killings, for a number of reasons. The analysis of 'honour' may then coincide too neatly with the self-serving self-representation of such violence by its perpetrators who use the language of honour and pride, and may run the danger of taking their definition at face value. Panchayat mandates for violent acts are emerging in new villages and regions which have no earlier history of them, as well as among backward castes, and are often related to emerging tensions between Dalits and OBCs.

An example of a caste panchayat appearing in a new area is Nathmalpur village at Devipur, district Kushinagar, Uttar Pradesh. Sanjo, a nineteen year-old low caste nonia woman, married but awaiting her gauna, was falsely rumoured to have borne a child. Her father was asked to kill her, when he refused, she was killed on 15 August 2001, on the mandate of a village 'panchayat' by five men who declared themselves 'panch'.[26]

Though these panchayats are perceived and represented as protecting local norms, customs and traditions, their traditions are often recently invented. The 'custodial' aura is not only useful in retaining existing power, but also a means of wresting new authority for caste panchayats. It also gives panchayat authority a populist air since, as jural groups engaged in 'customary practice,' they are often in conflict with statutory law.

Finally, caste councils are male dominated, and more significantly, as a site of inter- and intra-village alliances, they function as wider regional sites of power and patriarchal male bonding. They may be a lucrative source of regular incomes in some areas.[27] There are many recorded instances of caste panchayats presiding over complex monetary transactions, receiving payments or a cut. Indeed, fines establish long-term panchayat control over families.

Caste panchayats, largely of middle and lower castes, now comprise the bulk of non-formal jurisdiction. However, some co-operative interfaces are beginning to develop between caste panchayats and elected gram panchayats, and some gram panchayats are reproducing the pattern of caste council violence.

In village Sankarikalan, Balaghat district, Madhya Pradesh, in September 2002, the elected gram panchayat sentenced a school teacher, Bhuvaneshwari Pardhi to mass rape to 'punish' her for an alleged sexual involvement and for her 'immoral' conduct. They were supported by the district administration which delayed filing an FIR and watered down the charges to verbal 'obscenity'.[28]

Punishments for infringing the code of village exogamy or distance marriage, as in the Khedakul case cited earlier, protects a useful patriarchal convention that displaces women and inhibits the formation of long-term support networks for and among them. However, friendships and supportive relationships between women have also been subjected to direct attack, as is evident in the punishing, even burning of so-called helpers. Such attacks are not confined to exogamic north India. Many kinds of 'community' 'justice' seem to demand a breaking down of ties between women.

***In village Vanenur, Bellary taluk, Karnataka, in August 2001, Yerramma, a forty-year-old Dalit woman was accosted by four men and three women, all valmikis (nayaka), assaulted, and then paraded naked by the men because she was 'responsible' for the elopement of a scheduled caste boy and a valmiki girl from the village, a charge she denied. Her daughter who tried to intervene was molested, and her husband who tried to rescue her was also beaten.[29]

In this domain of 'customary' practice, sexuality is in the public gaze (not in a private space), and much of the violence is preceded by minute surveillance, tracking a woman's actions, movements, labour and reproduction. The responsibility of the family or caste group for the sexual surveillance of women interlocks with 'customary' arbitration, and this 'responsibility' can, paradoxically, provide a social acceptance of group crimes and allow them to parade as 'local' justice.

V

The prevention and policing of inter-religious marriage has become an established communal practice of Hindu right wing organisations like the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Bajrang

Dal, especially in Gujarat, and, has often been accompanied by anti-conversion campaigns. The line between communal violence and caste group violence is thin: they display a similar arrogation of adjudicatory power. Communal organisations like the BD seem to be combining the patriarchal role of families and caste panchayats in their surveillance of female sexuality, and practice the same denial of freedom and volition to women. In their attempt to annex and reconstitute the non-juridical sphere of customary arbitration, Hindu communal organisations have begun to function as a non statutory court-cum-police committed to the 'rescue' and 'restoration' of women in inter-religious marriages, to the de facto termination or dissolution of their marriages, and to 'retaliatory' action.

In Malda village, Siddharthanagar district, Uttar Pradesh, a past love affair between a Hindu girl and a Muslim boy that had already been terminated by the boy's family, still resulted in the 67-year-old widowed mother of the boy, Saira, being beaten, dragged naked through the village, and looted of all her belongings by sixteen men. In this attack, the girl's family acted in collaboration with the local BJP MLA and his 'private army'.[30]

In Gujarat married couples have been forcibly separated, arrested, and girls forced to say that they were abducted even in cases of long-standing relationships prior to marriage. This assumes 'community' ownership of women, and makes marriage secondary to religious primordiality. Marriages of Hindu women to Muslim men have been sought to be de-sanctified and redefined as abduction and trafficking.

In Bardoli, near Surat, in June 1998, Hanif Memon married Varsha Shah after a long relationship that was eventually accepted by both families. The VHP and BD along with the local press in their control, however, raised a hue and cry and claimed that the marriage was part of a conspiracy for beguiling Hindu girls who were then sent to other parts of India or to the Gulf countries for sexual exploitation. This campaign culminated in Hanif's arrest, while Varsha was beaten by VHP goons and forced to say that she had been coerced by Hanif. Even after this, VHP rallies continued and asked for an economic boycott of Muslims, while the shops and homes of Muslims were burnt. Such events are obviously manipulated to harass and boycott minorities, and as in Randhikpur, pivot on economic gain through loot and landgrab.[31]

In Randhikpur, Gujarat, 350 Muslims (mostly labourers along with Sugraben, an elected member of the gram panchayat) were forced to leave home for a month because two adivasi girls, Kanta and Nanda, had eloped with two Muslim boys from the nearby villages of Sanjeli and Malpur. From all accounts these were not abductions but the culmination of long-standing relationships. Yet angry crowds, supported by the police, prevented the return of the villagers and the homes and shops of Muslims were burnt in Randhikpur and Sanjeli. In Sanjeli too Muslims were attacked. Journalists were prevented from entering the villages. This violence was orchestrated by the VHP who dominate the gram panchayat, along with the BD. The response of the Gujarat state government was to set up a special cell to investigate, monitor and give 'permission' for inter-religious marriage, while the VHP announced its intention to form a squad to control the behaviour of Hindu girls![32] Here the state, the so-called community, and lumpen elements created interlinked rights to surveillance and intervention. And the definition of 'helpers' was expanded so much that hundreds of Muslims could be 'punished' for the 'transgression' of two young men.

The tactics of communal and caste based violence against women are converging in areas other than inter-marriage.

Several women corporators belonging to the Shiv Sena party, including former Mayor Vishakha (Naik) Raut, tried to strip and strangle Waqarunisa Ansari, also a corporator in the BrihanMumbai Municipal Corporation, inside the corporation hall on 16 March 2000. The Mayor and Chairperson, the leader of the House and other members watched in silence, without protest. 'Strip her naked, she speaks a lot against Balasaheb [Bal Thackeray]', the Sena corporators shouted as they attacked Ms Ansari.[33]

This incident displays an increasingly effortless replication of a patriarchal, even masculinist, agential model by women acting in the collective male gaze, and one which marked the convergence of urban public-civic space with rural and so-called traditional space.

Sexual violence and rape are now routinised communal weapons and seek social sanction as a violence in-the-name-of a religious community and a Hindu nation. Sexual assault has been directed against 'other' women from minority religions in many contemporary communal 'riots' which are collective orchestrated and fuelled by organised incitement.

The genocidal violence in Gujarat in 2002 was characterised by vicious assaults on the female reproductive body. Foeticide and infanticide were a recurring feature.

The pregnant Kauser Bano was raped, hacked and burned after the foetus was taken out and set on fire.[34]

Gopal Menon's film, *Genocide in the Land of Gandhi*, carries two eyewitness accounts of young boys who saw their pregnant sister's stomach slashed open, the foetus extracted and burnt, following which the women were burnt. In one case, the foetus was extracted and pierced with a spear to the cry of 'Jai Sriram'.

This triumphal enactment of collective control of the female reproductive body and the foetus, targetted minority women. It can also be seen as a public extension and a rechanneling of the general patriarchal control routinely exercised by the family or caste group on its own women.

VI

The last player is the state. The various facets of the state's involvement in violence are well documented in feminist writing which has consolidated a wide ranging investigation and critique. For my argument the most significant are: the general collusion of the state machinery, the specific involvement of the army in collective acts of violence and of the police in custodial gang rape, and the patriarchal norms at work in trials and judgements that shame women in court or put the onus of violence on them.

The dossier of state violence shows that the modalities of the police and army are very similar to those of higher caste landlords, caste councils and communal organisations.

In village Katka Manapur, Pratapgarh district, Uttar Pradesh, a Dalit woman was paraded naked by policemen and tehsil employees, and then kept in the police lockup for the night. She was trying to resist forcible eviction from her home because the land on which it was built had been allotted to someone else by the tehsildar.[35]

There was a mass rape of Dalit women in Pasaria village, Bihar by fourteen policemen in 1988. The policemen were acquitted on the ground that false testimony on the part of such women could not be ruled out: the women were said to be of 'questionable character' because they were engaged in 'menial work' and could not be equated with 'such ladies who hail from decent and respectable society'.[36]

In the 2002 Gujarat carnage, dozens of pregnant women were beaten on the stomach by the police in the 'combing operations' in Baroda.[37]

Such direct violence is not unconnected to the other ways in which the state machinery has been conducive to violence against women. If there is a general dilution of rights in the weak implementation of laws, then violence itself is one of the strategies of dilution and/or contravention that is employed by the state apparatus. As a consequence, in civil society violent acts are often structured around loopholes in the law, and rely on the routine dilution practised by the state to get away unpunished.

Acquittals in trials of rape have often come after the added violence of the 'public' exposure in determining the degree and nature of assaults on women. Most courts have placed a premium on chastity and honour (more that of the family than of the woman) – rape has been defined as violation of a woman's chastity rather than the violation of her right to bodily security and integrity.[38] Rape trials become a form of 'resexualisation' in which the woman is in danger of being 'proved' to be either chaste or a 'promiscuous whore', as consenting to rape or even as deserving to be raped.

If rape trials that shame, resexualise, and verbally 'denude' women are the ideological counterpart of physical violence, then the law has also been a *direct* site of patriarchal reinforcement, indeed of backlash. The judgement on the film *Pati Parmeshwar* in the 1980s in which a servile wife is treated inhumanly by her husband and in-laws is illustrative. The wealthy and educated wife, Rekha, is relieved of her jewellery by her in-laws who then attempt to poison and kill her, her husband is involved with another woman, but she remembers her father's advice to treat her husband like a god and be a pure pativrata. She unprotestingly fasts, prays, pays (gets large sums of money from her father for her husband), and even takes her paralysis-stricken wheelchair-bound husband, as his *naukarani*, to visit the 'other' woman. Three out of the four judges in Bombay High Court said this submissive wife did not represent or glorify ignoble servility. Indeed unlike those who were 'turning westward for everything,' this heroine upheld the 'basic Hindu culture, heritage and tradition or Indian ethos'.[39] Here the judiciary itself became the voice of backlash, and of an anti-westernism that produces 'other' women among Hindus.

VII

The common features in the violent acts discussed so far are fairly obvious. Violence, even when it is local, is meant to be pedagogic and symbolic, that is, to teach a lesson to all women and through such normativity produces 'other' women. The violent act, the special onus placed on women, the discrediting of their testimony, estranges women and turns 'own' women into 'others'. Much of this violence has a premeditated, collaborative and public character even when it takes place 'inside' the family, and is often publicly witnessed. It is often predicated on retaliation and backlash against Dalits, feminists, assertive women and 'helpers'. And there is a recurrent invention of traditions in new regions or among new groups as in the spread of dowry and caste council mandates.

How are the correspondences between forms of violence to be read without flattening them into the same? Why do these violences even have a discernible pattern or structure? Is it that patriarchies produce a regularity of dispositions, even though there is a variety of contexts for actual acts of violence?

One conclusion that seems inescapable is that patriarchies work through a founding inconsistency. They extract consent from women in part through the offer of protection, an offer they repeatedly violate in order to secure, reproduce and perpetuate themselves. The state violates its own citizens, the caste group violates its own members, family violence is wreaked against its own women. The promise of protection seems to give the right to injury!

The correspondences between different forms of violence also suggest that othering is a very significant feature, but that it may be overprivileged given that the same can be meted out to one's own women. The fact that similar forms of violence take place inside and outside the family, that the family both absorbs and radiates violence, indicates that the public and the domestic are jointly formed, and that they are not amenable to a tradition-versus-modernity reading. It also suggests that the slippage from the domestic space of the family to public space allows for, or actively assists, in the circulation of the modalities of violence.

Rather than containing the patriarchal family within the binary of sustenance and oppression, violence forces us to think that the point of the breakdown of love, protection and familial bonds in violent acts is the point at which patriarchal power is reassembled, and family, community and state are reinscribed as patriarchal institutions. Therefore violence is one of the points of reproduction, and ironically, also the point at which the faultlines of a patriarchal system are policed.

VIII

Though each type of violence carries, to varying extents, its own legitimating devices, it is obviously intertwined with the others. Sacralised violence, too, is not autonomous though it seeks to be. Violent acts in the name of religion, community or nation are often mutually reinforcing and produce complex symbologies that need to be unpacked for precise ideological effects. The symbologies at work here either sacralise violence or attach women to the 'sacred' entities of religion and nation, but the repertoire of violence as well as the location in systemic patriarchal structures and material factors is very similar to non-sacralised violence.

Widow immolation, which is enacted in the name of religion, is less frequent compared to most other forms of violence against women. It is also different in so far as it is an act which is studded with miracles, and in which the woman is glorified and idealised after immolation, while helpers are exonerated as believers. However, as a practice it has the same characteristics, and belongs to the same continuum as other forms of violence against women. Widow immolation too is a planned and premeditated lateral violence by familiar persons; it qualifies both as family violence involving women, and as a group crime, involving villagers, village elites and local power structures, and often relies on invented traditions. It constellates police and state complicity with local motives, communal interests, caste rivalries, religious institutions and material considerations which centre around the construction of lucrative temples. Women are as much a conduit to profit in a widow immolation for the family and village, as they are in a dowry killing.

Chastity is the underlying pivot of many forms of violence though it is coded differently. Widow immolation is simply the inverse of other forms of sexually regulatory violence, such as rape of low caste or 'other' women, in the sense that the burning of one's 'own' woman conserves her sexuality by destroying her life. Violence against women who 'belong' characterises sacralised violence as well as non-sacralised violence.

If widow immolation corresponds in many respects to family and group violence, it also corresponds with communal violence. At first sight widow immolation and communal violence seem to be quite distinct. Widow immolation is practiced on one's 'own' women who are deified, it has a ritual aura, takes the form of a death-rite, and women are used to reproduce a tradition. Communal violence is practiced on 'other' women and men who are dehumanised, it is geared to desecration, the victims often do not get the dignity of a death rite, and women are used to destroy traditional immunities both as victims and as assailants. (In the abduction and rape of nuns, and the attacks on convents and churches in Madhya Pradesh in the mid-1990s, the Hindu right used a woman, Sadhvi Rithambara, to destroy the traditional immunities of nuns and churches with particular symbolic effect.)

On closer examination, the ideology and techniques of widow immolation and communal violence are remarkably similar. Like communal violence, 'sati' was historically constructed in defence of 'endangered' Hindu women. Indeed the two have an intertwined history, especially from the nineteenth century when 'sati' moved from being largely an upper caste, ruling group practice, to a 'nationalist' construct that could be ideologically claimed by all 'Hindus'. Both still produce masculinity through the identification of women with community, and through a definition of the 'manhood' of a caste/religious group by the degree of control its men exercise over women: a masculinity that depends on a spectacular and collective exercise of violence. Both are sacralised and perpetrated in the name of religion, and invoke 'culture' and 'religion' as a right at points when these have become an excercise of political-patriarchal power or are implicated in forms of inequality. Communal violence creates a demographic paranoia to justify destruction of the female reproductive body, whereas widow immolation relies on the fear of the widow's unregulated sexuality for justification. Both stem from the same generalised assumption of control over the female reproductive body.

If communal violence is meant to polarise Hindus and others, send a message to minorities (the VHP's stated intent was to make the Gujarat carnage 'a model for reprisals' and 'to teach a lesson that could be emulated'[40]), and to all women who step out of bounds, then widow immolation is set up as a sifting mechanism to sort out good women from 'other' women. 'Sati' is central to the production of 'other' women, that is, those who belong to other religions, do not believe in the ideology of sati, are unhinduised Dalits, westernised or feminists. The symbolic effect of the violence is directed at all such 'other' women. It produces the *norms* that govern other forms of patriarchal violence: norms of correct behaviour. If the spectre of the good-woman-who-she-cannot-hope-to-be hangs behind the stripped-shamed-raped 'other' woman – be she Dalit, Muslim, Christian or 'deviant' – then this 'other' woman is not merely a product of normative social and religious discourses but also of widow immolation supported by the ideology of sati. It is hardly surprising, then, that the Hindu right supports widow immolation on the ground. In 1987 Vijaye Raje Scindia, the president of the BJP Mahila Morcha, led a protest march against the anti-sati legislation, while in Madhya Pradesh in 2002 the local BJP MP condemned the administration's failure to prevent the immolation, but also demanded withdrawal of all cases and the immediate release of the fifteen persons arrested in connection with the incident![41]

The Hindu right's communal violence is of course not confined to 'other' women: as a norm-producing violence it must threaten and attack women from the majority community. 'Religious' animosity against Muslim and Christian minorities functions as the hub around which a new form of social policing of women has been organised. This re-authorisation of patriarchal norms through a discourse of anti-westernism is expected to compensate for the sycophantic capitulation to global capitalism. In Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat, group attacks in the name of anti-westernism have been levelled in both urban and rural areas. In these the ABVP and other Hindu right 'student' groups have been empowered to attack convent schools, draw up a code of conduct, monitor the behaviour of girls, enforce dress codes, ban jeans, Valentine's Day and mixed parties, and organise anti-garba campaigns.

The pedagogic impulse of widow immolation and communal violence is elaborated in supportive, often triumphalist, prachar and printed literature that can instigate, propagate, exculpate, tutor and lay the ground for future events. If Gujarat had pamphlets that taught how to make an organised riot look like a 'spontaneous' reaction by the public, and how to attack without being caught and punished,[42] 'sati' pamphlets have laid out a modus operandi structured around legal loopholes for decades. Both share the signal distinction of having perfected techniques of memorialisation that are simultaneously modes of legitimation and further incitement. Both use symbols around which violence can be mobilised, and situate themselves in the 'Hindu' militant lineages of Shivaji and Maharana Pratap.[43] The remains of the dead are instrumental for both: the corpses and ashes of karsevaks for the VHP, the ashes of the immolated widow for sati supporters. Both invent 'victory' rituals, traditions and genealogies around acts of vandalism and murder; both extract temples from bloodshed.

Both 'sati' and communal violence position themselves as 'above' the state or even in overt defiance of it. The disputed puja, disputes over construction of temples and the jubilant defiance of bans feature as much at widow immolation sites as in the VHP's Ramjanambhoomi campaign. Both vacillate between historicity and popular belief in their own justification.

The anti-westernism of sati and communal ideologies should of course be taken with a pinch of salt. Howsoever shrilly they may denounce the 'foreign hand', foreign aid, both monetary and ideological, has been actively sought, taken and given since the colonial period. For instance, Weinberger-Thomas' *Ashes of Immortality* not only arrives, with a remarkable ventriloquism, at exactly the same conclusions as sati supporters, but seems to share their commitment in other ways as well. The book not only rehashes the tired claim that sati has scriptural sanction but boldly asserts that sati is 'fundamental' to Hinduism. The incitement of the widow is represented as the genesis of a sacrificial calling, the sati as a renouncer and as twinned with Shakti. Non-believers, she says, cannot understand that sati is part of the spread of Sakta Tantra because they take a view from above.[44] The author's fieldwork included attending the secret worship of Om Kunwar in Jaipur in 1993 (after the legal prohibition of glorification in 1988), and resulted in a rhapsodic description of the atmosphere of 'religious transport,' 'infectious warmth' and 'ardent prayers' (p. 111). It seems her native interlocutor here, the sister-in-law of Bhairon Singh Shekhawat (BJP), praised Rajasthan's satis as exceptional acts of love and *sut* with 'her eyes shining', while all the others present at this puja said the same 'with equal conviction' (pp. 170, 217).

Belief in sati for Weinberger-Thomas is an expression of the faith of such 'rural' masses, its opposers are elite, bourgeois, alienated and westernised women. She raises the fearful spectre of secular feminists trying to shape their own culture, follows the Hindutva line of demonising feminists as alienated non-believers, and describes them as dangerous pressure groups and colonial outsiders. She rejects the feminist location of contemporary widow immolation as a new type of concatenation and prefers to see it as a continuous and living tradition.

There is another equally remarkable bond between widow immolation and communal violence – both are ideological adepts at shifting the onus on the victim to escape shame, guilt and punishment. Weinberger-Thomas cannily strengthens this bond as well when she describes the perpetrators as 'sacrificers', and situates changes in the practice of widow immolation within a *retaliatory* complex which neatly puts the onus on the widow: first as a Hindu backlash against Muslims (beginning from fourteenth century Vijaynagar), then Christians (beginning with British colonisation), and then against the 'secular' anti-sati legislation in 1988. For example, a 'pre-sacrifice' in which the widow proves her determination and volition by burning her hand, that is described in traveller's accounts but 'nowhere codified in Indian tradition'(p. 37), to her 'appears to be linked to the foreign presence in India' and a 'backlash by the indigenous society against a foreign presence': it seems *women themselves* asked for this ordeal by fire 'as a strategy for aiding Hindu belief to emerge victorious over Christian prejudice, and for ensuring that their own capacity for heroic sacrifice be universally acknowledged' (p. 42)!

In widow immolation, the onus rests on the woman, she is represented as desiring, dictating, orchestrating, stage-managing her 'self-immolation': people merely obey her commands. The same abdication of Hindu male initiative occurs in communal violence. It seems if the first initiative is not that of Hindu men then all their subsequent actions can be justified as retaliation. If sati works through an exorbitance of ideologies of female volition, then Hindutva violence aggrandises the agency of its victims. Its own activities such as deliberate incitement, the organised production of hatred that precedes and accompanies violence are all discounted, the onus for violence inflicted by the majority is always put on the victimised minorities: they 'start' each chain of events and Hindus only 'retaliate'.

Retaliation is a recurrent alibi of widow immolation and communal violence; it cannot be taken at face value and is in fact the name for recalcitrant ideological formations. In communal violence, retaliation is intended to provide a theory of contexts, especially in places where there is no prior history of communal conflict, and where violence has been transported in an organised mobile package. When sati is defined as 'backlash' in the past, then retaliation is the name for both a Hindu communal re-reading of history and for an antifeminism that is intended to resist or annul the gains of contemporary women's movements.

There are of course many similarities in the techniques of widow immolation and communal violence. The most significant and ominous similarity lies in the purposeful crowds. As fieldwork on widow immolations since 1947 shows, in most cases the husband died after a long illness, his death was anticipated, the funeral was performed with great haste. Yet the 'rumour' of a 'sati' circulated faster than the preparations for the funeral, and large crowds gathered from neighbouring villages to 'watch'. No one in these crowds was a casual bystander; no one tried to prevent the burning. On the contrary, these crowds physically hemmed in the widow, leaving no path open for her to escape, while some helpfully threw coconuts, brambles and wood on the burning pyre, or pushed the burning woman back onto the pyre.

The active pressure of the witnessing crowd shapes widow immolation. The desire to witness is itself coercive. The crowd closes alternative options for the women, it completes the process begun by family and priests. The very presence and complicity of the crowd legitimates and sanctifies 'sati' as a 'religious' event. (Could widow immolation even qualify as a religious event if it was confined to the marital family and there were no other 'witnesses'?)

The impatience of crowds at immolations in Banda and Mathura has been recorded; so has the aggression, anger and fury of the crowd when the immolation of Jaswant Kunwar in Devipura, Rajasthan, was prevented in 1985. In 2002, in Patna Tamoli, Madhya Pradesh, the crowd had became even more purposeful. In the greed to 'watch' the spectacle, it not only gathered at a pre-designated time, but reportedly attacked and stoned the policemen who arrived on the scene, and cheered as Kuttubai burnt. It was also canny enough to vacate the village en masse after the event. Such avidity to witness speaks of a stake, not of disinterested spectators or passive worshippers.

The lenient attitude towards these crowds stems from the ideological definition of 'sati' as an 'individual' decision, when in fact families, village elites, religious institutions, and ordinary villagers are actively involved at every stage. Immolation is not an individual act. It is a collective act that can be more accurately described in terms of the woman's *submission* to the will of family and village than in terms of her own volition. The over-individualisation and idealisation of sati disguise the collective will at work. The crowd does not merely become an accessory after the woman has made up 'her' mind. Rather, the event could not take place in the same way without a purposeful crowd. Once widow immolation is characterised as a group event then the participants begin to resemble the exultant crowds in the Gujarat carnage who looted, burned, hemmed in the victims, did not allow ambulances to reach the dying or fire engines to douse the flames, sealed routes of escape, as well as the police and BSF who became complicit onlookers.

Collective crimes are symbolically much more effective because they are public and appear to be consensual; they seem to work better as 'backlash' and 'retaliation', and provide a modality that can be adapted by policemen and villagers alike. Legal loopholes, state collusion or open support, and lack of implementation have together granted an immunity to collective crime, an immunity that has increased the power and reach of groups and crowds. Groups can cross new thresholds into an excessive, gratuitous violence that is not so readily available to individuals. There seems to be a corroborative legal tendency to see crowd violence as mob frenzy, as spontaneous and unpremeditated, and therefore as less culpable than acts of individual violence. More ominously, collective violence provides a readier *passage* from communal and patriarchal ideologies to physical acts of violence, and organised groups are crucial to this passage.

As legally punishable offenses, widow immolation and communal violence are often misread as assertions of power 'against' the modern state by crowds of believers; in practice, however, they work 'with' the state because they rely on the (de facto, ideological or tacit) complicity of the state. The temptation to read these crowds as tradition against modernity-bureaucracy-rationality, or as an assertion of civil society against a corrupt-delegitimised state, is equally misplaced because there is a growing articulation between the two, which in fact reached its apogee in the Gujarat carnage.

IX

If widow immolation is virtually a condensation and intensification of aspects of so many forms of violence against women, then why is 'sati' exceptionalised? The perception of widow immolation as exceptional stems from a naive anti-colonialism and/or the desire to prove that women are agents and not mere victims or dupes of ideology. And since it becomes somewhat difficult to identify the agency of dead women with their material interests, religious faith comes to be over-privileged as the donor of agency.

Tradition and colonialism were not discrete. Colonialism strengthened and retraditionalised several older patriarchal social relations, ideologies and practices. Contemporary widow immolation is not a precolonial or a colonial residue. Though the ideological ground was re-prepared in the colonial period, the present practice is located in an economy of commodification, the political transformation of caste groups in the past century, the anti-feminist resistance to democratisation of caste and gender, and the local assertion of village elites. The 'anti-colonial' problematic of seeking agency in 'sati' is uncomfortably close to the position of those who support the practice and/or the ideology, it is also historically inaccurate. As is evident from histories of the practice, colonialism supervised, interlocked with, restructured, *and* banned the practice, and British administrators found Indian corroboration for each of these.

It is problematic to oppose the victim narrative with a conferral narrative of agency – since both are patriarchal narratives, and both are ideologically generative. Rather, a history of the patriarchal conferral of agency on women may need to be written.

The conferral of a 'will' on the sati belongs to the same ideological realm as the delegation of other forms of patriarchal agency to women.

What is *named* as women's own agency is the precise coincidence of the widow's will with that of family-village-community, that is, her will *represents* the consensus around her. If and when it does not, as in refusal or in attempts to escape (as by Roop Kanwar), it is ignored or not recognised at all. A widow's acts of refusal have to be de-recognised because they rupture the representative will, enact a woman's individuation, decline to submit to the surrounding consensus and reject the conferral of patriarchal agency as a ruse. The dangerous voices of dissenting widows and attempts by women to assert the refusing will are almost always reclassified in accounts that wish to conserve the practice. (Weinberger-Thomas, for instance, reclassifies it as woman who has wavered in the call to sacrifice).

In non-sacralised violence the ascription of an invidious agency to women – for example, women themselves invite sexual harassment and rape by being westernised or promiscuous – is clearly seen for what it is: as a rationalisation of violence, as a false attribution of consent, as ideology, in other words, it is seen as attributed agency. In sacralised violence such as widow immolation, agency is sought *in the woman* and in her *own* subjectivity, her pain, her determination: volition is suddenly exalted and becomes the primary issue. At one level, this merely assists a neo-orientalism in which the sati is a woman ambushed by her own conjugal and otherworldly desires. At a wider level, this resacralises widow immolation: it is through the concentration of agency on women that a violent act is given the ideological meaning of sati.[45]

One may well ask: when is women's testimony believed? Disbelief seems to be the rule in rape, in claims to innocence as among 'helpers' of illicit marriages. Women have had to struggle to establish belief in their testimony both in and out of court, but there is instant belief in the so-called testimony of the immolated widow, her words alone are taken at face value. The almost total lack of belief in a woman's testimony (as after the gang rape of Bhanwari), stands in ironic contrast to the total belief in the smallest word or gesture of the woman-who-is-to-be-immolated.

X

The sacralisation of some forms of violence thus reduces multi-factored acts to religious faith alone. The point is not that there are no religious explanations for widow immolation. There are, but they do not by themselves produce a practice. What is needed for the practice are points of vulnerability for women, a political and social conjuncture, a broad grammar of violence and techniques of organisation of violence against women, that is, those features that widow immolation shares with other forms of violence. If all these are taken away, what remains is ritual and religion, and these two can equally be said to have political and patriarchal histories.

Ritual and religion did not develop and reproduce outside the contexts of economic, political and patriarchal power. Indeed here religion can be read as a heterogeneous field upon which new models of tradition are erected, through which emerging or mobile classes and castes are defined or consolidated. Religion has to be grasped as part of a social ensemble and as a changing phenomena. In other words, the positioning of religious factors in a political economy is subject to change, and sacralising 'sati' is meant to deny changes in the practice and to delink it from other forms of violence against women.

All spectacles of patriarchal violence involve some degree of existing consent and legitimation while violence against women can be collective without the aid of religious faith. Spectacle cannot, then, be exclusively associated with religious ritual. And it is a mistake to valorise or conflate sacralised violence with religious faith when it is locked into the same patriarchal structures as other forms of domestic and public violence. The retraditionalisation of widow immolation obscures the nature and the extent of the surrounding patriarchal consensus.

If instead of culturalism and compartmentalisation, the conjunctural specificity and correspondences between forms of violence were to be read, then the patterns and effects of retraditionalisation would emerge with greater clarity. They may lead out of religious particularism and into the brutal cultures of capitalism and the transnational production of patriarchal ideologies.

NOTES

1. Catherine Weinberger-Thomas, *Ashes of Immortality: Widow-Burning in India*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1999, p. 1. My italics.
2. Weinberger-Thomas, pp. 141, 118–19, 130.
3. Vikas Adhyayan Kendra, 'Patriarchal Fears and Misogynic Assaults 1', *Facts against Myths* 5:11, 1999, p. 2.
4. For instance in Orissa, Dalits were attacked because a Dalit woman dressed up as 'well' as upper caste women when she went to recieve her wages (Vasanth Kannabiran and Kalpana Kannabiran, 'Caste and Gender: Understanding Dynamics of Power and Violence', *EPW* 26:37, 14 Sep 1991, p. 2131).
5. Kannabiran and Kannabiran, pp. 2131–32.
6. See Kanchan Mathur, 'Bhateri Rape Case: Backlash and Protests', *EPW* 27:41, 10 October 1992, pp. 2221–24; Kavita Srivastava on behalf of Forum Against Violence on Women, 'The Bhanwari Rape Case', ms; *Pioneer*, 27 Nov 1995.
7. For an extended discussion of disparate class locations within the family, see Kumkum Sangari, *Politics of the Possible*, Delhi, Tulika, pp. 292–94, 375–78.
8. It has been pointed out that women experience domestic violence at every stage from infancy to old age (Malavika Karlekar, 'Domestic Violence', *EPW* 33:27, 4 July 1998, p. 17420.
9. Leela Visaria, 'Violence Against Women: A Field Study', *EPW*, 13 May 2000, pp. 1745, 1749.
10. See Karlekar, p. 1747.
11. Karlekar, p. 1747.
12. Hindustan Times, 29 Feb 2002.
13. For cases see Kirti Singh, *Law, Violence and Women in India*, New Delhi, Unifem, no date, pp. 43, 47.

14. Visaria, p. 1749.
15. For case studies see Women's Centre, *Annual Report*, Mumbai, 1997, pp. 10–11.
16. This is a largely middle and upper class phenomenon. Gujarat has the highest number (Karlekar, p. 1743).
17. Dolly Arora, 'The Victimizing Discourse: Sex Determination Technologies and Policy', *EPW* 31:7, 17 Feb 1996, p. 423.
18. Karlekar, p. 1747.
19. Prem Chowdhry, 'Enforcing Cultural Codes: Gender and Violence in North India', *EPW* 32:19, 10 May 1997, p. 1020.
20. *Indian Express* and *Hindustan Times*, 27 Feb 2002.
21. Chowdhry, p. 1020.
22. Chowdhry, p. 1020.
23. Chowdhry, pp. 1019–20, 1024.
24. Chowdhry, p. 1021.
25. For instance, in Dewa village, near Jamshedpur in Bihar, in 1991 a munda tribal, Turi Barjo, and his paramour, Daki Champia, were beaten to death and then hanged by the village mukhiya and his henchmen because Turi Barjo had complained about the mukhiya's corruption, and also because his family were unable to pay the brideprice amount for Daki fixed by the mukhiya (*Indian Express*, 22 Feb 1991).
26. *Hisaab Report*, Lucknow, 2001.
27. From a study of two villages in Gujarat, it seems that lower caste councils too are most often all-male and vehemently oppose entry of women. The caste council decides on rules of marriage, divorce, arbitrates disputes – and at every engagement, wedding, divorce and dispute, the elders get money. Marriages and divorces require their sanction and presence, and they order boycotts and outcasting of non-compliant families. Caste councils of different villages support each other. See *The Silken Swing: The Cultural Universe of Dalit Women*, eds. F. Franco, J. Macwan and Sugunna Ramanathan, Calcutta, Stree, 2000, pp. 106, 111, 39–40.
28. *Hindu*, 23 Sep 2002; *Panchayati Raj Update* 9:9, Sep 2002, p. 3.
29. *Hindu*, 28 Aug 2001.
30. *Pioneer*, 23 May 1993.
31. Sahiyar, *Report on Randhikpur*, Godhra, 8 Aug 1998; New Democracy, *Gujarat: Minorities in the Storm of Communal Attacks*, New Delhi, 1998, pp. 1–2.
32. Sahiyar, *Report*; New Democracy, *Gujarat: Minorities*, pp. 3–5, 7.
33. *Panchayati Raj Update* 7:3, March 2000, p. 5; *Communalism Combat*, April 2000, p. 29.
34. *Communalism Combat*, Mar–April 2002, pp. 21, 23.
35. *Hindu*, 22 Sep 2002.
36. Vikas Adhyayan Kendra, 'Patriarchal Fears and Misogynic Assaults I', p. 2; Vikas Adhyayan Kendra, 'Patriarchal Fears and Misogynic Assaults II', *Facts Against Myths* 5:12, 1999, p. 2.
37. See PUCL Vadodara and Vadodara Shanti Abhiyan, *Violence in Vadodara: A Report*, Vadodara, May 2002.
38. Kirti Singh, p. 27.

39. The judgement is cited in P.A. Sebastian, 'Upholding Ideology of Male Domination', *EPW* 24:14, 8 April 1989, pp. 717–718.
40. *The Telegraph*, 10 Mar 2002.
41. *The Hindu*, 10 Aug 2002. For earlier complicities and convergences between widow immolation and the Hindu right, see Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, 'Institutions, ideologies, beliefs: widow immolation in contemporary Rajasthan' in *Embodied Violence* ed. Kumari Jayawardene et al, Delhi, Kali, 1996.
42. See *Hindustan Times*, 26 Mar 2002.
43. The 'logo' of the Rani Sati temple in Jhunjunu – a trishul with eyes and a bindi – seems to be converging with the trishuls of the Bajrang Dal and the Durga Vahini.
44. *Ashes of Immortality*, p. 218. All further page references are included in the text.
45. See Sangari and Vaid, 'Institutions, ideologies, beliefs'.

SECTION THREE

KNOWLEDGE SYSTEM

CHAPTER 9

A Century and a Half's Journey: Women's Education in India, 1850s to 2000

Aparna Basu

SECTION I

1820s–1850s

My great grandmother, Parvatikunvar was born in Surat in 1828. She was married when she was 5 years old and never went to school. Neither of this was unusual. Child marriages were widely prevalent not only in Gujarat but also all over India and among all castes and communities in the early years of the nineteenth century. It was rare, in fact, to find a girl above the age of 10 or 11 unmarried. Nor were girls sent to school. There were strong and deeply rooted prejudices against women's education which was regarded as unnecessary, dangerous and unorthodox. In his Report on the State of Education in Bengal (1836) William Adam observed that the state of instruction amongst "this unfortunate class cannot be said to be low, for with a very few individual exceptions there is no instruction at all. Absolute and hopeless ignorance is in general their lot". He wrote: "A superstitious feeling is alleged to exist in the majority of Hindu families, principally cherished by the women and not discouraged by the men, that a girl taught to read and write will soon after marriage become a widow".[1] He also commented on the fear shared by Hindus and Muslims alike that "a knowledge of letters" might facilitate intrigue. It was also feared that education would undermine the feminine qualities in women and bring disgrace on their families. An educated girl would become less amenable to discipline and less likely to submit to her parents' choice of a husband. When Sir Erskine Perry, Chief Justice of Bombay, suggested in 1852 the appointment of a committee of European ladies to supervise girls' schools, it aroused strong opposition. The *Chabuk* saw in it a danger of Western educated girls making slaves of their husbands. "If they cannot succeed in this", the paper prophesied, "they will drag them into courts of justice, to make a display of their talents, their culture, and the power they have acquired by their knowledge". The facetious editor portrayed a vision of judgment: Sir Erskine on the Bench expecting with ill concealed malignity, the arrival of the luckless husband with his wife, the latter shouting 'knowledge is power'.[2]

A woman's role was to look after the home where she could by her chastity and virtue devote herself to her husband and family. It was held that by offering women the opportunity for education 'society would merely suffer'. In addition to this, there was the practical orthodox apprehension that once girls started attending schools, they would become discontented with their traditional role in life, perhaps even with their husbands. "A woman's intelligence does not rise higher than her foot, her rightful place was to serve her family". "Start with founding a high school for girls and it would soon lead to women running away from the home", wrote Bal Gangadhar Tilak.[3]

Purdah or seclusion of women was not so common in Western India, particularly among Parvatikunvar's caste, the Nagars of Gujarat. Nor was it very prevalent in South India. But purdah was widely observed among high caste Hindus and Muslims in Eastern and Northern India. This was another reason for girls not going to school. Whereas the education of boys was related to employment, girls' education had no economic function. The purely domestic role of girls fostered the belief that education of girls was a waste since it could not be put to any financial use. The cost of education in terms of fees, cost of materials, and so on, as well as the temporary loss of a helper in the household were additional deterrents reinforcing existing social taboos.

Saudamini Roy of Barisal, for instance, personally experienced the effects of these prejudices against women's education. As a child she was sometimes sent to the village pathshala along with her brothers. The teacher took no notice of her, but she was a quick learner and absorbed his instructions as well as the other male pupils. One day he saw that she had written something very advanced. He was amazed and angry, "For women to pursue education is a terrible sin. The education of women leads to destruction, if they are educated they will become widows, so from now on don't come to my pathshala again".

It is, therefore, not surprising that the surveys of indigenous education undertaken by the governments of Bombay, Madras, and Bengal Presidencies in the 1820s and 1830s revealed an almost total absence of girl pupils from the indigenous village schools as well as from the schools of higher learning, both Hindu and Muslim.[4]

Though girls did not go to school, they were not all illiterate. Women from "respectable" families often studied at home. Adam found that in Bengal wives and daughters of zamindars, courtesans, and Vaishnavis, i.e. women followers of the 16th century Vaishnav saint Shri Chaitanya, were literate. Gauri Vaishnavi, who was well versed in Sanskrit and Bengali, taught the women in the family of Dwarkanath Tagore. Raja Radhakanta Deb also engaged a Vaishnavi to instruct the women of his household. These Vaishnavis employed by the rich families in Calcutta read the Ramayana, Mahabharata, and stories from the Puranas. Pearychand Mitra, the great literary figure of Bengal in the nineteenth century wrote in the preface of his *Adhyatmika*: "I was born in the year 1814...While I was a pupil in the Pathsala, at home I found my grandmother, mother and aunts reading books. They could write in Bengali and keep accounts. There were no female schools then".[5] Similarly, upper class Muslims employed *uttanis*, who were often wives or widows of maulvis, to teach women the Quran and other religious teachings at home. Parvatikunvar's mother taught her to read and write at home. There were many such instances all over India. Debendranath Tagore's mother-in-law could read difficult religious texts. This was true of Muslim women also. Sir Syed Ahmed Khan's mother, Azizunnisa Begam (1780–1857), a woman in strict purdah, knew Arabic and Persian.[6]

Learning to read and write for a woman was not, however, always easy. Among the earliest women's memoirs from the nineteenth century are stories of a passionate craving for knowledge. Rasasundari Devi born in 1809, taught herself to read by stealing a few minutes from her housework and looking after twelve children. She wrote: "After some time the desire to learn how to read properly grew very strong in me. I was angry with myself for wanting to read books. Girls did not read…People used to despise women of learning…In fact older women used to show a great deal of displeasure if they saw a piece of paper in the hands of a woman. But somehow I could not accept this".[7]

Rasasundari overcame all opposition and obstacles, learnt to read, to write and wrote her own experiences.

During Parvatikunvar's childhood, English education had made a beginning in India. The pioneers in the field of men and women's education were Christian missionaries who were allowed to operate in India by the East India Company after the Charter Act of 1813. It is difficult to discover who took the first step but all missions were convinced of the importance of women's education. Robert May of the London Missionary Society (LMS) started what was perhaps the first school for girls in Chinsurah in Bengal in 1818. Almost at the same time, Mrs.Traveller, the wife of a LMS missionary, opened a school for Eurasian girls at Veprey (Madras). The Baptist missionaries at Serampore, Carey, Marshman and Ward were determined from the start that education must be accessible to girls and in 1819 they enlisted the support of several English ladies of Calcutta to form the Calcutta Female Juvenile Society in an attempt to make some organizational provision for girls' education.[8] The Patron of this society was Raja Radhakanta Deb, the leader of the conservative section of Calcutta. A Native Female Society was established at Serampore where under the eyes of a respected teacher, several Hindu girls sat in a classroom separated from the boys by a mat partition. This experiment did not succeed because of the fear of arousing opposition of the local population.

William Ward, one of the Serampore missionaries, during his visit to England in 1820, addressed an open letter to the 'Ladies of Liverpool and the United Kingdom' in which he drew attention in vivid and exaggerated terms to the Indian women's state of 'ignorance and superstition', which he claimed had 'no parallel in the history of tribes the most savage and barbarous'. After giving examples of infanticide, child marriage and above all sati, Ward urged his 'countrymen' to put an end to the suffering of Indian women by educating them.[9] In response to this, the British School Society of London opened a subscription for sending a schoolmistress to India and in 1821 Mary Ann Cooke arrived in Calcutta. She can be regarded as the first missionary woman to have come out to India especially to promote women's education. She started a school under the auspices of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) with the splendid title of 'The Ladies' Society for Native Female Education in Calcutta and its Vicinity'. She married the CMS's Rev. Isaac Wilson and both husband and wife started this school in 1828 with 58 girls. By 1836, they had 30 girls' schools meant for 'respectable Hindu girls' and enjoyed the patronage of 'respectable Hindu gentlemen' and were staffed by Brahmin pundits. The curriculum included reading, writing, spelling, and needlework. The school texts included the Acts of the Apostles, St. Mathew's Gospel, Bible history, and Pearce's Geography. Apart from the Central School, the Ladies' Society and CMS had several schools in Calcutta and other towns in Bengal such as Burdwan, Agarpara, and Krishnagar.[10]

The American Missions in Bombay city started a school in 1824 and by 1829 they had 9 schools with 400 pupils. The CMS's first school in Bombay was started in 1826 and in the course of the next ten years it opened schools for girls in Thane, Bassein, and Nasik. The LMS and the Irish Presbyterians opened schools for girls in Gujarat and Saurashtra. In 1839, Margaret Wilson and her husband, Rev. John Wilson of the Scottish Mission started a school for girls in Bombay city which is known today as St. Columbia High School.[11]

The CMS opened its first boarding school for girls in Tirunelveli in 1821. In 1840 the Scottish Church Society had six schools in Madras with 200 pupils. By mid nineteenth century the missionaries in Madras were instructing nearly 8,000 girls.

The number of mission schools or their enrolment does not really reflect the attitude of Indians towards women's education at that time. 'Respectable' Hindu girls were not sent to these schools for fear of conversion. Those sent, were usually Christians, orphans or girls from lower castes and poor families. They were often given money for regular attendance. In many cases a copy of the Bible, Prayer Books, and some clothes were also given to attract and retain pupils. Adam found that in Bengal missionary schools became popular among Bagdis, Haris, Tantis, Chandals, Kurmis, and other backward castes who were not welcome in the indigenous village schools. Right till the emergence of the backward caste movements in the 1920s and 1930s, lower castes, untouchables, and tribals were educated by Christian missions rather than by the dominant castes or the government.

Christian missionaries were the first to focus on the condition of Indian women. This directed the attention of the new urban Indian intelligentsia to this issue. Faith in modern education led them to believe that education of women was necessary to achieve any reform not only in the condition and status of women but in the state of society at large. Social reformers wrote and spoke on the necessity of female education and argued that it was not proscribed according to the Hindu shastras. Gaurmohan Vidyalankar's *Strishikshabidhayak* published in 1822 by the Calcutta Book Society gave examples, historical and scriptural, of educated women in ancient India to show that female education was not prohibited in India. Had not Gargi defeated in debate the most learned *rishis* in the court of King Janaka? asked the Gujarati poet Narmad.[12] In Bengal, the students of Hindu College, particularly the 'Young Bengal'group, took up the cause of women's education. Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar founded 35 schools for girls in the Southern districts of Bengal and fought long and hard to have them recognized and aided by the government, a fight he won only on account of his personal friendship with the Lt. Governor of Bengal. The students of Elphinstone Institution in Bombay established a Students' Literary and Scientific Society mainly as a result of the efforts of Professor Patton, Dadabhai Naoroji, Bhau Daji, Rao Saheb Mandlik, and other young men fired by ideas of social reform. In 1849, some students of this college started experimental schools for girls and within a few months they were running seven schools. Lord

Falkland's government regarded the spontaneous establishment of these schools as an epoch in the history of education of Bombay Presidency.

From Bombay city, the movement for female education spread to other cities. In Surat, Durgaram Mehta, a social reformer established a school for girls in 1851. In Ahmedabad, the Gujarat Vernacular Society founded by Alexander Forbes, started a school for girls in 1849 and the next year Harkunvarbai, the widow of Harisingh Keshar Singh, a leading Jain businessman of the city, opened a school for girls. Sheth Maganbhai Karamchand, another leading Jain merchant, donated Rs. 20,000 for a girls' school. Jotiba Phule realized the importance of educating lower castes and women and despite stiff opposition from orthodox quarters started a school for girls in Poona in 1851. His wife, Savitribai, whom he had educated, was the headmistress of this school. Such was the prejudice against education of shudras and girls that Savtribai was under constant threat of physical persecution and a peon was employed to take her to and from school. Despite these threats, Phule opened two more schools for girls in Poona. In his memorandum submitted to the Indian Education Commission in 1882, Phule pleaded that "the Education Commission be kind enough to sanction measures for the spread of female primary education on a more liberal scale".[13]

While missionaries and social reformers had been active, the East India Company had not taken any steps for the education of girls as it felt that this was a controversial issue both on religious and social grounds. To support it would, therefore, involve a dereliction of the principles of religious neutrality to which the Company was pledged. In 1853 Col. Jacob told the Select Committee of Parliament: "I do not think a single female has come under the government system of education yet".[14] In none of the Dispatches relating to education submitted or received from the Court of Directors in the first half of the nineteenth century is there any mention of female education. The credit for changing this official attitude of indifference goes to John Drinkwater Bethune, the Law Member in the Governor-General's Council and President of the Council of Education. Convinced of the need for female education, Bethune opened a school for girls in Calcutta in 1849. It was originally called the Hindu Female School. The school though called Hindu, was secular, in that it did not impart any religious instruction, though the pupils were all Hindus. Instruction was in Bengali, there were no fees and books were free. For those girls who lived far away and could not afford transport, a carriage was provided. On it was emblazoned a Sanskrit verse declaring that a daughter's education was a father's religious duty. Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar was appointed the School's Secretary. Debendranath Tagore, a Brahmo, sent his daughter, Saudamini, to the school and so did the orthodox Pandit Madan Mohan Tarkalankar to show high caste Hindu support. In addition to donating his personal library with books worth Rs. 5000 to the School, Dakshinaranjan Mukherjee gave his land in the Mirzapur area for a building for the school. The wealthy merchant, Ram Gopal Ghose, also helped. This shows that there was considerable support for female education from the intelligentsia, "local notables" and wealthy citizens of Calcutta. Bethune died in 1851 and Lord Dalhousie, the Governor General of India from 1848–56, decided to support the school and renamed it after Bethune. The Government of India wrote to the Government of Bengal that, "no single change in the habits of the people is likely to lead to more important and beneficial consequences than the introduction of education for their female children".[15] In his famous Education Dispatch of 1854, Sir Charles Wood said: "The importance of female education in India cannot be over-rated; and we have observed with pleasure the evidence which is now afforded of an increased desire on the part of many of the natives to give a good education to their daughters. By this means a far greater proportional impulse is imparted to the educational and moral tone of the people than by the education of men".[16] Dalhousie hailed it as "the beginning of a great revolution in Indian habits".[17]

SECTION II

1850s–1920s

The breakthrough in women's education came with the establishment of Bethune School, though it would be wrong to assume that hundreds of girls flocked to it or that it was run very efficiently. Nevertheless, it was after this that reformers started thinking in terms of establishing more schools for girls. Social reformers all over India now began talking and writing about the benefits of women's literacy and education through their organizations, journals and newspapers. They argued that if educated, women would be able to correspond with their absent husbands; do household accounts; instruct their children. A knowledge of hygiene would lead to healthier children; educated women would be better housewives; education was necessary for enlightened mothers and hence for an enlightened race.

Among the first to educate their girls were the Parsis in Bombay. From the 1840s Parsi girls had been educated at home, often secretly. Framji Cowasji Banaji educated his daughter and his example was followed by Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy and Maneckji Cursetji. Literacy among Parsi girls was the highest. In 1886, nearly 70% of Parsi girls of school going age were in schools.

The Brahmo Samaj led the movement for female education in Bengal. Keshub Chandra Sen, a Brahmo leader, lectured on the importance of female education and in 1862 organized a society, the *Bambodhini Sabha* for women's education. In the same year, Umesh Chandra Dutt started publishing the *Bambodhini Patrika* which carried articles on women's issues and organized a correspondence course for girls through its columns known as *antahpur shiksha* or education in the seclusion of the home.

In Bengal, and elsewhere, in the closing years of the nineteenth century, the content and purpose of girls' education became an area of considerable debate among a wide cross section of people – social reformers, conservatives, housewives and the women who were being educated. Was the object of education production of good mothers and wives? When would the time arrive to push beyond this limited objective? What kind of education would prepare women to play their role along with men in exercising their rights and duties? The answers to these questions were diverse and widely debated. Dadabhai Naoroji wrote a note in 1882 giving his views on this subject: "The time will come when natives generally will see the benefit of female education as a great social necessity to rise in civilization and to advance social happiness and progress; and will understand that woman had as much right to exercise and enjoy all the rights, privileges, and duties of this world as man, each working towards the common good in her or his respective sphere. But that time has not come yet".[18] For the time being, according to Dadabhai, government should provide home education. "Good and educated mothers only will raise good and educated sons". Individually many Indian men and women, like Naoroji, held views in advance of their times but social pressure and hold of tradition were strong. While on the one hand, vigorous efforts were made to spread girls' education, at the same time, society was repeatedly assured that the object of female education was not to make women great scholars but better mothers, sisters and wives. Educated women would become intelligent companions for their husbands. The *Brambodhini Patrika* published a number of articles under the title *strisangini* (wife companion) which were basically vignettes from the lives of women who had helped their husbands' careers by providing them with a caring and understanding home ambience.

In 1871, on his return from England, Keshub Chandra Sen started the Native Ladies' Normal School under the auspices of the Indian Reform Association. This was a teachers' training school for women teachers with a primary school for girls added to it. All the pupils were Brahmos. However, his views on women's education did not satisfy the radicals in the Brahmo Samaj. Sen was not only against higher education for women, but also objected to the teaching of subjects such as mathematics, philosophy and sciences to girls. In 1874, the radicals – Dwarkanath Ganguly, Shibnath Shastri, Durgamohan Das and others broke away from Sen and together with the visiting Unitarian, Annette Akroyd, set up the Hindu Mahila Vidyalaya with five pupils. Two years later, the name of the institution was changed to Bangiya Mahila Vidyalaya. Miss Akroyd had differences of opinion with the reformers and left but the school continued. Among its first few students were daughters of eminent Brahmos such as Durgamohan Das' daughters, Sarala (later married to P.K. Ray who was herself an eminent educationist and started the Gokhale Memorial Girls' School) and Abala (later married to Sir Jagdish Chandra Bose and who founded the Brahmo Girls' School), Jagdish Chandra Bose's sister, Swarna Prabha, Manmohan Ghosh's sister, Binodmani as well as Kadambini Basu (a cousin of Manmohan Ghosh and later Dwarkanath Ganguly's wife). In 1878, this school merged with Bethune School to become Bethune College.

In Maharashtra and Gujarat, the Prarthana Samaj propagated the cause of women's education through reformist newspapers and journals such as *Subodh Patrika*, *Indu Prakash* and *Buddhi Prakash* and through personal example. Madhav Govind Ranade educated his young wife Ramabai, at home.[19] Ramanbhai Nilkanth encouraged his wife, Vidyagauri to continue her schooling after marriage and then go on to college. Vidyagauri and her sister Sharda became the first two women graduates of Gujarat and became role models for generations of Gujarati women.[20]

In Madras, it was the Theosophical Society that encouraged women's education. Annie Besant (1847–1933) spoke eloquently about the position of women in ancient India and how they were educated. She founded a college to teach girls the ideals of Indian womanhood. Reformers like Virasalingam Pantalu laid great emphasis on women's education.

In north India, the Arya Samaj, a reformist Hindu sect, founded by Swami Dayanand Saraswati, encouraged female education. The Jullundar Samaj opened the

Arya Kanya Pathshala (girls' elementary school) in 1890 with a lady principal in charge. The Arya Kanya Mahavidyalaya (Girls' High School) was started later. Both the schools were established largely due to the efforts of Lala Dev Raj.

Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, a great promoter of Western education for Muslim boys saw no need for women to go to school. He held that women were inherently inferior to men physically and intellectually. They were more emotional and less rational and home education was adequate for them. In his evidence before the Hunter Commission, he argued "No satisfactory education can be provided for Muhammedan females until a large number of Muhammedan males receive a sound education. The present state of education among Muhammedan females is in my opinion enough for domestic happiness, considering the present social and economic conditions of life of the Muhammedans in India". When the men would be educated that would have "a powerful, though indirect effect on the enlightenment of Muhammedan women.... Any endeavours on the part of the Government to introduce female education among Muhammedans will, under the present circumstances, prove a complete failure, so far as respectable families are concerned, and in my humble opinion, will probably produce mischievous results, and be a waste of time and energy".[21] Contrary to Sir Syed's opinion, Badruddin Tyabji, in 1882, viewed favourably schools for Muslim girls and regretted that not one Muslim girls' school in Bombay taught English.[22] Among sharif Muslim women in the nineteenth century knowing how to read was unusual enough but knowing how to write was very rare indeed. There were, however, exceptions such as the Begams of Bhopal. Sikander Begam (1819–1868)), Shah Jahan Begam (1838–1901) and Sultan Jahan Begam (1858–1930) who had no male heirs, were all educated, though they observed purdah. They were patrons of education for girls in their state and also elsewhere. Sultan Jahan even learnt English from male teachers. By the beginning of the twentieth century, there were petitions, memorials and articles in newspapers and journals asking for schools for Muslim girls. In 1906, Sheikh Abdullah and his wife started a school for Muslim girls in Aligarh. The Muhammedan Education Conference at its annual meeting in 1912 passed a resolution that "the spread of education among Muhammedan girls is a matter of paramount importance", necessary for the progress of the community.[23] Thus there were some signs of change though the old mind- set still persisted. The Anjuman Islam Sunnut-Jamaat of Bombay opposed compulsory education for Muslim girls as late as 1920.

Between 1849, when Bethune School opened, and 1882, when the Indian Education (Hunter) Commission reviewed the Progress of Education in India, primary education for girls had made some progress but secondary and higher education for them was still rare. When my grandmother, Vidyagauri Nilkanth (1876–1958) wanted to continue her education beyond the primary level, there were no secondary schools for girls in Ahmedabad. Special arrangements, were, therefore, made at the Mahalakshmi Teachers' Training College for teaching her and a few other girls, most of whom were Parsis and Indian Christians. In 1886–87, there were only 5 government managed, 3 local and municipal boards maintained, 221 aided and 15 unaided secondary schools for girls in the whole of India and one girls' collegiate school with nine pupils. In 1882, only two percent of girls of school going age were in school. The Hunter Commission recommended that "female education be treated as a legitimate charge alike on local, municipal, and on provincial Funds, and receive special encouragement". It wanted all female schools to be eligible for aid and the conditions of aid to girls' schools to be easier than to boys' schools. The standard of instruction in girls' schools should also be easier than in boys' schools and should be drawn up with special reference to the requirements of home life. Liberal aid was to be offered to girls' schools in which English was to be taught in addition to the vernacular. Provision ought to be made for special prizes and scholarships for girls.[24]

The need for women teachers was recognized, among others, by Mary Carpenter who visited India in 1866 with the special objective of looking at the state of female education. "The grand obstacle to the improvement of Female schools and to the extention of them, is the universal want of female teachers".[25] She noted the absence of trained female teachers except in mission schools and emphasized the importance of establishing female teachers' training schools. The Secretary of State approved in 1868 the Government of India's scheme for the establishment of female normal schools in the Presidencies of Bengal, Madras and Bombay. An annual sum of Rs. 12,000 for five years was assigned for this purpose. The first government teachers' training school was established in Poona in 1870, with 8 pupils, all widows, some of whom did not even know the alphabet.

Some of the girls who completed high schools wanted to go on to a college. One such was Chandramukhi Bose, daughter of Bhuban Mohan Bose, a Native Christian of Dehra Dun, who had studied at the American Presbyterian School at Dehra Dun. She wanted to appear for the Entrance examination of Calcutta University in 1876. She was given qualified permission to do so and the Junior Board of Examiners declared her to have attained the Entrance examination standard in the examination. The Banga Mahila Vidyalaya authorities were not satisfied and urged Sir Arthue Hobhouse, Lt. Governor of Bengal and Chancellor of Calcutta University, to arrange for a test examination for two of their pupils – Kadambini Basu and Sarala Ray. As they succeeded in their test, the University could not debar them from the Entrance examination. The Senate of Calcutta University resolved "that the female candidates be admitted to the University examination subject to certain rules".[26] Kadambini Basu sat for the Entrance examination in 1878 and passed in the second division, missing a first division by just one mark. This was a historic event in women's education. Kadambini was awarded a Junior Scholarship of Rs. 15 and a book prize of Rs. 60 by the Lt. Governor on condition of her continuing her studies. Kadambini wanted to continue but there were no girls' colleges and men's colleges did not admit girls. College classes were, therefore, started in Bethune School in 1879. Both Chandramukhi and Kadambini attended these classes and passed their B.A. examination in 1883 to become the first women graduates in the British Empire. Kadambini then applied for admission to the Calcutta Medical College. Dwarkanath Ganguly and other Brahmo leaders started agitating for the admission of girls to the Medical College. Sir Rivers Thompson, the Lt. Governor, intervened and Kadambini was allowed to join the Medical College. The medical profession was thus thrown open to women in Bengal. In 1886 Kadambini was awarded the GBMC (Graduate of Bengal Medical College) instead of the MB (Bachelor of Medicine) degree, because she had failed one part of her final practical examination. Later, she went to Edinburgh and Glasgow for additional degrees. Anandibai Joshi (1865–1887), a Marathi woman, also received her medical degree in 1886. She graduated from the Women's Medical College in Philadelphia as their first Indian student and the first Hindu woman to study medicine abroad. Anandibai was married at the age of nine to Gopalrao Vinayak Joshi, a man who was determined to educate his wife and she advanced in her studies under his tutelage. The first woman to qualify in medicine from Bombay University was Miss Annie Walker (later Mrs. Sharp) in 1889. The Madras Medical College had, however, admitted four girls in 1875 for a certificate course and in 1881–82, the first woman was admitted for the L.M.& S. course.

In 1885 Lady Dufferin, wife of the Viceroy, established the National Association for Supplying Female Medical Aid to the Women of India or the Dufferin Fund. This association provided financial assistance to women willing to be trained as doctors, hospital assistants, nurses and midwives; aided in establishing medical training programmes for women; and encouraged the construction of hospitals and dispensaries. By 1888 the government of India was supervising the work of the association and providing employment for women graduates.

In 1883, Bombay University allowed girls to appear for the Matriculation examination and pronounced that henceforth the pronoun 'he' and its derivatives used in the University Act would apply to women also. In 1888, Cornelia Sorabji passed the BA examination standing first class first in the entire university. She then proceeded to Oxford and obtained a degree in jurisprudence. She was the first Indian woman to qualify for the Bar examination and was the only woman barrister for many tears.

Progress of women in tertiary education was very slow. In 1897, forty years after the establishment of the Universities of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras, less than 90 women in the whole of India were enrolled for a university degree. Even in 1915–16, the number was only 457.

While male social reformers had been working for women's education, women had been initially too suppressed to be even aware of their subordinate status. The first few women who received education were deeply committed and felt it their duty to educate their sisters. Ramabai Saraswati, Ramabai Ranade and Savitribai Phule in Maharashtra, Swarnakumari Debi, Sarala Debi Chaudhurani, Sarala Ray, Abala Bose, and Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain in Bengal, Vidyagauri Nilkanth and Sharada Mehta in Gujarat, Sister Subbalakshmi and Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddi in Madras were some of the pioneers of women's education. One of the first Indian women to publicly undertake propagating women's education was Pandita Ramabai Saraswati (1858–1922). A young widow herself, Ramabai wanted all women, particularly widows, to be self-supporting and economically independent. She reiterated again and again that the salvation of women lay in their own hands and that they must not depend on men. She firmly believed in women's independence and felt that the chief means for improving women's position was education. In her book *The High Caste Hindu Woman*, she cites the example of Chandramukhi Basu and Kadambini Ganguly. The only careers she or others could think of for women at this time were medicine, teaching and nursing. After returning from her visit to England and the United States in 1889, Ramabai started Sharda Sadan, a home for widows with a view to educating them and making them self-reliant. The following year she shifted the institution to Poona. Due to her conversion to Christianity, Ramabai aroused the anger of the orthodox Hindus of Poona and she shifted the centre of activity to Kedgaon where she established Mukti Sadan whose aim was to make its students economically independent. Pandita Ramabai was the first woman to start a women's association in western India. With the foundation of the Arya Mahila Samaj in 1882, women's organizations were inaugurated in different parts of the province. The Samaj was meant to be 'the centre from which might issue a powerful agitation for the emancipation of the enslaved women of the land' and education was one means of doing so.

The need for women doctors made the government feel that it was important to train medical women, both Indian and domiciled Europeans, in a separate college staffed entirely by women. In 1914, there were only 89 women medical students all over India and the majority of them were Parsis, Indian Christians, and domiciled Europeans. Very few Hindu and Muslim girls went to medical colleges and it was believed that this was because parents were unwilling to send their daughters to co-education colleges. With this in view, the Lady Hardinge Medical College was opened in Delhi in 1916. Till Independence it was the only medical college in India exclusively for girls.

In the 1890s Dhondo Keshav Karve established a number of schools for girls in Poona. In 1896 he opened a home for widows which became a school. The curriculum in this school was designed to make young widows employable and self-sufficient. Because there were not enough schools for girls, Karve was asked to admit unmarried girls as well. This led him to set up the Mahila Vidyalaya (Girls' School) to train "good wives, good mothers and neighbors". Parvatibai Athavle, sister of Karve's wife, Anandibai, helped Karve in the growth and expansion of his schools. Parvatibai was a great advocate of women's education but she wanted women to be given an education suited to their special domestic life, in a way that would teach them to manage their homes better, make their homes beautiful and healthy so that their husbands are attracted to the home and do not stay out. She held that for the majority of women marriage was the goal and she was against women seeking employment. Parvatibai wanted to create a national movement for women's education to make women better mothers and homemakers.

Karve's third institution for women was the women's university founded in 1916 in Pune on the model of a women's university in Japan. All courses in this university were conducted in the vernacular, special subjects like domestic science, music and fine arts were taught and it was possible for women not to study subjects like mathematics and physical sciences. The university was soon adopted by Sir Vithaldas Thackersey with a generous donation and a stipulation that the university be named after his mother Shrimati Nathibai Damodar Thackersey Indian Women's University (SNDT) and relocated in Bombay.

The debate on what girls should be taught continued. The Calcutta University Commission (1919) in its Report stated that two distinct needs must be kept in mind in the organization of women's education: "the vast majority who will spend their lives in *zenana*, whose education will cease at an early age, and who ought to be trained to perform their *zenana* duties with interest and knowledge, and on the other to understand and sympathise with the interest and work of their husbands and brothers, and secondly, the need of the small but very important minority who will go out into the world to serve their fellows in professional callings, or will play their part in the intellectual activities of the progressive section of Indian society, and want a higher training to be enabled to do so". Teaching and medicine were the two professions for women that the Commission could envisage.[27]

1920s–1947

The 1920s were years of immense social and political awakening. With the launching of the first Non-Cooperation movement by Mahatma Gandhi in 1921, and his appeal to women to join his satyagraha, women came out of their homes in large numbers to picket shops selling foreign cloth and liquor, march in processions in the streets, hold public meetings and court imprisonment, and this weakened the traditional bondages. While several feminist scholars have criticized Gandhi for not challenging patriarchal values, there is no doubt that he brought women out of their homes into the public arena. This was an important intervention marking the beginning of the end of women's seclusion. The Indian National Congress organized an All India Ladies Conference at its annual meeting held in Ahmedabad in 1921–22. It was presided over by Bi Amma, the mother of the Ali Brothers. Women from all over India were thus brought out of the four walls of their homes, not just women of the reformed families but illiterate, rural women as well as rich, middle class and poor urban women. This reduced further the prejudices against women's education. Education of women came to be a public issue, opposition to it not withstanding. The slogan of social reformers by this time had become "Educating a girl means educating a family". In recognition of their role in the freedom struggle, the Indian National Congress in its resolution on fundamental rights adopted at the Karachi Congress in 1931 declared that "all citizens are equal before the law irrespective of religion, caste, creed or sex in regard to public employment, office, power or honour". The National Planning Committee appointed by the Congress in 1939, also passed a resolution that in a planned society, women's position will be equal to that of women. Indian nationalist leaders time and again declared that women's education was essential for national development.

Women's associations had started being established all over India in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Most were geographically limited but they shared the goal of bringing women together to discuss women's issues which were defined as education, child marriage, the observance of purdah and women's status in the family. Mention has already been made of Pandita Ramabai Saraswati's Ayra Mahila Samaj. In the same year, in Calcutta, Swarna Kumari Debi, sister of poet, Rabindranath Tagore, founded Sakhi Samiti. Her daughter, Sarala Debi Chaudhurani, started the first all India women's association, the Bharat Stree Mandal in 1910 but it did not last long. Three major national women's organizations emerged after the First World War: the Women's Indian Association (WIA) the National Council of Women (NCW) and the All India Women's Conference (AIWC). The WIA started by Annie Besant, Margaret Cousins and Dorothy Jinarajadasa, in 1917, in Madras, was primarily for asking for votes for women in the new constitution to be introduced by the Montagu Chelmsford Reforms. The main objective of AIWC was the promotion of women's education.[28]

Mr. Oaten, Director of Public Instruction in Bengal, urged women to decide what kind of education was most suitable for Indian girls and then tell the government "with one voice what they want, and keep on telling us till they get it". It was in response to this that Margaret Cousins sent circular letters to women leaders throughout the country suggesting they organize local conferences to discuss educational issues. Each conference was to prepare a memorandum on female education for presentation at an all India conference to be held in Poona.

The All India Women's Education Conference held its first meeting in Poona in January 1927. It was attended by a large number of social reformers, professional educationists, women associated with the national movement and the wealthy and titled. They came from all parts of India and from all castes and communities. Numerous resolutions were passed outlining the best type of education for women. Most delegates favored an education system that would allow the fullest development of the individual's latent capacities. At the same time, they wanted to teach girls the ideals of motherhood, how to make the home attractive and how to help others. They also stressed the importance of moral and physical education. The first conference condemned early marriage as it interfered with girls' education. It also emphasized the legal rights of women. However, women's education was still essentially perceived as strengthening their roles within the dominant ideological framework of social reform and nationalism. The concept of education as a prerequisite for women's equality was the first demand of the AIWC.

The AIWC did not advocate mass education for all women nor did it urge that all middle-and upper-class women should receive the same education as men. The majority of the delegates desired that the education system should produce better wives and mothers but they also wanted women teachers, doctors, professors and lawyers. The AIWC collected donations for an All India Women's Education Fund, which in turn started Lady Irwin College, in Delhi, the first domestic science college for girls.

As a result of women participation in the freedom struggle and also the effort of the women's organizations, the prejudices against women's education started lessening. There were 23,517 educational institutions for girls in 1921–22. By 1946–47, the number had increased to 28,196. The number of girls enrolled in various institutions increased from 1,424,422 to 4,297,785, in these years. A large number of girls were studying in co-educational schools and colleges. Women's education did expand during these years but it was still confined to urban areas. Private education contributed greatly to the expansion of women's education until independence. Expenditure on female education had always been very low. In 1881-82, of the total expenditure on education, 3% to 6% was spent on female education in different provinces. In no province of British India, in these years, did annual expenditure from all sources on female education exceed Rs. 22 per thousand of the female population. Women's education depended largely on non-government funding – charitable trusts, private endowments, mission schools, etc. till 1947. Major initiatives in this area came from Indians.

1947–1975

Government Policy

The framers of the Indian Constitution viewed education as an instrument of social change, individual mobility and social equality. Article 45 enjoined that 'the state shall endeavour to provide within a period of ten years from the commencement of the Constitution, compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14'. Article 15 (3) makes a special provision enabling the state to take affirmative action in favour of women and children and Article (A) (e) imposes a fundamental duty on every citizen to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women.

The first education commission to be constituted after independence, the Indian Universities Commission (1948–49), headed by Dr. Radhakrishnan, noted the importance of women's education and the need to provide opportunities for women to express themselves in different fields. The first two Five Year Plans sought to link women's education to training women for professions. The Secondary Education Commission (1952-53) had no separate chapter on women's education but was gratified to see women joining faculties of engineering, agriculture, medicine and commerce. In fact, there were few girls enrolled in engineering, agriculture or commerce. While insisting that girls should be given the same education as boys, the Commission laid special emphasis on the teaching of Home Science to girls as it would prepare them for life after school. The Second Five Year Plan (1955–1960) emphasized the need for creating a public awareness on the importance of girls' education. It suggested the appointment of more women teachers, free accommodation for women teachers in rural areas, scholarships for girls, condensed courses for adult women, etc. but provided little financial support. The Third Five Year Plan (1960–1961) had little to say about women's education.

In 1958, a committee was appointed under the chairmanship of Mrs. Durgabai Deshmukh to deal exclusively with women's education. The committee recognized that women's education posed a special problem and that a bold and determined effort was necessary to tackle it. It recommended that more funds should be allotted for girls' primary education, a National Council for girls' and women's education be set up, and that a special unit dealing with girls' education be created in the Ministry of Education. The state governments were asked to take greater interest and enlist the cooperation of voluntary organizations and the public in the promotion of women's education. It suggested a campaign against the traditional prejudices against women's education, appointment of female teachers, separate schools for girls, if required, provision for free books, writing material and uniforms and construction of hostels for girls.

As recommended by the Deshmukh Committee, the National Council on Women's Education was set up in 1959, which in turn constituted a Committee on the Differentiation of Curricula for boys and girls (1961). This committee found no justification to divide school subjects on the basis of sex and proposed a common curriculum for boys and girls up to the primary stage. It even suggested the inclusion of home science in the core curriculum for boys and girls in elementary schools to counteract traditional stereotypes regarding feminine and masculine tasks. It rejected the traditional argument that the existing division of labour between men and women is based on their different psychological traits which in turn arises out of sex differences. The National Council appointed another Committee in 1963 to look into the causes for the lack of public support, particularly in rural areas, for girls' education and to enlist public co-operation.

The Education Commission (Kothari Commission, 1964–66) fully endorsed the recommendations of these earlier committees and observed that the role of educated women outside the home had become an important feature of Indian life. The National Education Policy Resolution of 1968, while rejecting a gender differentiated approach to the content of education, remained silent on the strategies and instruments for implementing a common curriculum. Thus in the first twenty-five years after independence, the emphasis was on women's higher education, the focus being on urban middle class women but here also more was said than done.

The Committee on the Status of Women (1971–74), *Towards Equality*, found that in the Census of 1971, about 68% of women in the age group 15–25 and nearly 87% in the age group 15 years and above were illiterate. It also drew attention to the high rate of dropouts. The committee accused the planners and policy makers of an urban middle class bias and wrong assumptions regarding women's roles, needs and priorities. It recommended a common curriculum for boys and girls, pre-school education, co-education, part time education for girls who could not attend school full time, free education for girls up to the secondary stage, and multi entry for girls, among other things. It highlighted that instead of changing social values and attitudes regarding women's roles, the education system had contributed to strengthening and perpetuating traditional ideas of women's subordination through curricula, the classification of subjects on the basis of sex and the unwritten code of conduct enforced on their pupils.

The Women's Movement and Women's Education

The Report of the Committee on the Status of Women and the United Nation's Declaration of 1975 as the International Year of Women, beginning with the First World Conference on Women at Mexico, generated a new interest in and debate on women's issues. There was a resurgence of the women's movement that found expression both in activism and the academia. The women's movement in India demanded that education had to play 'a positive interventionist role' in changing social attitudes to make both men and women accept gender equality and women's empowerment. The question of women's education assumed greater importance as women struggled for gender equity and for recognition of women's role as vital to the economy and in society. Women's education was seen not just as a failure of education policy but also as systemic to Indian society. It was increasingly realized that education of poor women particularly in rural areas had been sadly neglected.

The Indian Association of Women's Studies came into being in 1981–82 to bring together those engaged in teaching, research and action programmes. As a result of the increased interest in women's issues, women's studies centers were started in universities, which have become an integral part of the institutionalized system of higher learning. Women's issues have become academically much more visible. A number of non-government organizations (NGOs) shifted their agenda from simple literacy classes towards programmes of self-help through which women could acquire skills and get gainful employment and financial independence. Literacy was combined with teaching women about health, nutrition and practices of everyday life. The Rural Development Society in Chingleput district of Tamil Nadu, for instance, which was formed in 1979, started functioning in villages where women's groups or sangams were formed. Their activities included literacy classes, health training, 'cradle programme' to prevent female infanticide and campaigns against child marriage, illicit arrack, dowry and violence against women. Small, local level NGOs sprang up all over the country which tried to spread literacy among women in rural areas and in urban slums.

1975–2002

The Draft Sixth Five Year Plan (1975–83) admitted that the benefits of education had failed to reach the majority of the people. The Sixth Five Year Plan (1980–85) emphasized eradication of illiteracy, universal primary education and job-oriented programmes. The Plan had for the first time a chapter on 'Women and Development' which said that efforts should be directed towards enrolment and retention of girls in school, income generating activities for girls outside school hours for supplementing the family income, increase in the number of women teachers, etc. The Seventh Plan (1980–90) envisaged similar measures. In 1985, a document, 'The Challenge of Education', was published by the government to elicit widespread debate and led to the National Policy of Education (1986) which for the first time recognized gender inequalities in education and women's empowerment through education as priority areas. It advocated positive, interventionist role of the national education system for empowerment of women and development of new values through redesigned curricula and textbooks. Participation of the people through local bodies, particularly the involvement of women was recognized as crucial. The Programme of Action updated in 1992 once again stated that education would be used as an agent of basic change for equality and empowerment of women.

Women NGOs and voices were raised against sex stereotypes in school textbooks picked up issues of school curriculum in the 1980s. A few women's groups took up the task of critically examining the depiction of women in textbooks. The Report of the National Committee of Self Employed Women and Women in the Informal Sector, *Shramshakti*, also highlighted the invisibility of poor women workers and their stereotyped images in school curricula and adult literacy primers and suggested the revision of books and primers. A few organizations pressurized the state to change the gender bias in textbooks but this was not pursued in a sustained manner because of other issues, such as violence against women, regarded as more important.

The National Perspective Plan 1988–2000 reiterated the NEP's view of the role of education in empowering women in order to overcome inequalities and disparities. Following UNESCO's emphasis on 'education for all', several innovative programmes of non-formal education were launched in the 1990s.

The National Literacy Mission was started in 1989 with the aim of imparting functioning literacy to around 80 million illiterates in the age group 15–35. Later, the 9–14 age group was also included, raising the target by another 17 million. While not specifically directed towards women, the NLM attempts to inculcate values such as women's equality.

The Total Literacy Campaign emerged for a time as an effective and viable model for the education of illiterates. In 1989, a voluntary agency, the Kerala Shastriya Sahitya Parishad, asked the NLM for financial assistance for a mass campaign in Ernakulam district for launching a '*sampurna saksharta yagnam*' or total literacy campaign. The movement involved cultural shows, processions, plays, songs, puppet shows, padyatras, etc. The objective was to generate awareness and create a favourable climate for literacy. By 1990, Ernakulam became the first fully literate district and from this developed the TLC model that was later implemented in nearly 400 districts. The Pudukottai Mavatta Aribvoli Iyakkam, a voluntary society in Tamil Nadu, launched a total literacy movement in which women's literacy was specially emphasized and literacy programmes were accompanied by income generating activities to motivate women to learn. Women were taught to cycle as part of the literacy campaign. Around 60,000 women learnt cycling and this not only helped them in their daily chores such as fetching water, going to the ration shops or hospitals, but also boosted their self-confidence.

In Nellore, Andhra Pradesh, a government initiated programme to eradicate illiteracy taken up in each district, played a prime role in making women aware of social issues and leading the agitation against arrack distillation. With education, women were able to prevail upon village elders and contractors to close arrack shops, take care of their subsistence and send their children to school. Chittoor in Andhra Pradesh was another district, which implemented the TLC in 1991 with about 60,000 volunteers teaching some 600,000 learners, 85% of whom were women. In Bhemai village in the largely tribal district of Dungarpur in Rajasthan, the age of marriage rose and so did social awareness as a result of women's literacy.

TLC campaigns have now become operational in more than 250 districts in the country. Skills of reading, writing and numeracy are imparted to the non-literate, most of whom are women. It has been found that women's motivation for literacy is usually very high. While the TLCs in many areas have been quite successful, usually when the local population has been involved through voluntary agencies, they have not been able to fulfill their targets. They initially generate considerable excitement through street plays, troupes singing songs, etc., but it is difficult to sustain this kind of enthusiasm for long.

In order to focus attention on gender issues in TLCs, *Samata*, a *gyan vigyan jatha* for women, was launched in 1993. For a month, cultural troups traveled through the countryside performing street plays, singing songs and generally trying to raise people's awareness on gender issues. The movement was short lived and its gain limited.

The Mahila Samakshya project (education for women's equality) was launched with the assistance of the Government of Netherlands in 1992 to promote women's equality and empowerment through education. As of 1999–2000, the programme was under implementation in over 7000 villages in 51 districts of eight states of the country – Assam, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh. Mobilization of women is the basic strategy. At the grass-root level, Mahila Sanghas or women's groups mobilize women and motivate them to become literate. *Sahayoginis* (guides) initiate, co-ordinate and facilitate the work. A cluster of ten villages is provided with one *sahayogini.* Mahila Samakhya was conceived not just as a literacy programme but also as a means of total education by which women would get confidence and control over their lives.

The success of the scheme has not been uniform. In Karnataka it had apparently reached the socially oppressed groups of women while in Gujarat it had not. The under utilization of funds and vacant posts here indicated that the programme was not properly backed up by the kind of commitment needed. An evaluation of the programme in U.P. revealed that the workers were enthusiastic and motivated and that the potential in women was sparked by just minimal education and exposure to the outside world. It was felt that greater autonomy was necessary for the scheme to be successful and the needs and priorities of the women concerned should be taken into account.

The Bihar Education Project, started with the assistance of UNICEF in 1993 for universalizing primary education in certain districts of Bihar, had as one of its aims to make the education system more responsive to the needs of women and to ensure that it promotes equality of women and facilitates their empowerment.

The District Primary Education Programme was started in 1994 in 42 districts of 17 states where female literacy was below the national average and where the TLC had generated some demand for education. It focused on the reduction of gender disparities in education and particularly on girls from socially and economically disadvantaged groups. It aims to provide access to education through either the formal or non-formal system. Activities under the programme include upgradation and creation of school infrastructure, provision of teachers, production of teaching learning material, etc. By 1999–2000, the programme had covered 219 districts in 15 states.

The Lok Jumbish (movement of the people) was launched in 1992, supported by the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), in Rajasthan, where 80% of women were illiterate and of every 100 children deprived of primary education, 70 are girls. Government agencies and NGOs try to run these programmes together. The *Shiksha Karmi* Project, also funded by SIDA and the Government of India, commenced in 1989 in about 2000 remote and socio-economically backward villages in Rajasthan to solve the problems of poor enrolment of girls, high dropout rates, teachers' absenteeism and irrelevant curriculum. In primary schools, teachers were substituted by two educational workers or *shiksha karmis* who were local persons living in the village who were supposed to teach 40 to 50 children for two or three hours a day and in addition have evening classes for children who cannot attend during the day. *Aangan pathshalas* (courtyard schools) were set up for girls. Elderly women were used to escort girls to schools in difficult areas and to take care of younger siblings. Till 1999 the project had covered 2715 villages in 146 Blocks of 32 districts.

The success of these adult literacy programmes has often fallen short of expectations. Women will learn to read and write effectively if they can see the relevance of what they are learning to their daily life and the tasks they have to perform. For instance, in Banda district in U.P. the Mahila Samakhya collaborated with the Jal Niyam, the government agency responsible for the installation and maintenance of hand pumps, to train some local people in pump maintenance and repair. Women took a leading part in this programme and once trained, expressed a desire for more information and reading material on a range of topics. They were eager to read a hand pump manual. It is obviously important to find out why and what women of a particular area want to learn to read.

Literacy

In 1947 India's population was forty crores; today we have nearly 50 crore illiterates of whom 63% are women. Despite all the recommendations of various committees and commissions, policy initiatives and plans of action, efforts by the state and NGOs, progress in women's literacy has been very slow. No doubt there has been some advance. In 1951, only 8.86% of Indian women were literate, as against 54.16% in 2001. The definition of literacy has, however, changed and today anyone who can simply write her name or any sentence without even understanding its meaning is regarded as literate. Also, the literate population is now counted for those above the age of seven, whereas previously it was five. While the percentage of illiterate women has declined, the total number of illiterate women in the age group 7+ increased from 76.9 million in 1951 to nearly 190 million in 2001.

There are of course, as is well known by now, vast regional variations. Kerala has 87.86% female literacy, while Bihar is at the bottom with 33.57%. Female illiteracy is concentrated in certain states: 155 of the 247 districts where female literacy is lower than the national average are concentrated in the four states of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. Kottayam district in Kerala has the highest female literacy, 96% and Jhabua in Madhya Pradesh has the lowest, 19%. These disparities are due to geographical, social, and historical reasons. Kerala is a fertile state with no water shortage and easy communications, whereas Rajasthan is desert land with acute water scarcity. The backwardness of Jhabua is largely due to the fact that it is in an extremely arid region where the main problem is to get water. Some communities in Kerala, Mizoram and Meghalaya have a matrilineal system in which the status of women is high and property belongs to women. There is no seclusion of women unlike in Rajasthan and some of the states in the Gangetic heartland. There are no instances of sati recorded in Malabar. Kerala has not been subjected to repeated foreign invasions unlike the northern states where, as a result, women were kept in purdah. Kerala was also fortunate in having rulers who promoted women's education. Also, early in its history it had Christian missionary schools for girls. The urban/rural divide is also not as sharp here as in some other states.

Urban/rural disparities in literacy are striking. In the country as a whole, in 1991, female literacy was 30.6% for rural areas as against 64.1% for urban areas. 27 districts had less than 10.5% literacy. There are 134 districts with a female literacy rate of less than 20%. Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe women are at the bottom of the heap, the former having a literacy rate of 24% and the latter 18%. Scheduled caste female literacy rate was lowest in Bihar, 7.07%, while ST female literacy rate was lowest in Rajasthan, 4.42%. The highest was in Nagaland, 54.51%. As regards gap in the male female literacy rate, Mizoram has the lowest: 4.56% followed by Meghalaya: 5.73% and Kerala: 6.34%, while Rajasthan has the highest: 32.12%, followed by Jharkhand: 28.57% and Uttar Pradesh: 27.25%.

Enrolment

There has been a spectacular growth in the number of schools and colleges and enrolment at all levels. Girls' enrolment has grown from 5.4 million in 1950–1951 to 47.37 million in 1995–1996. The corresponding increase at the middle level has been from 0.5 million to 16.5 million. Although girls' enrolment has grown faster than that of boys, they continue to lag behind, with their proportion to the total going down with every successive higher level. In 1995–1996, girls formed 40% of all students in the education system, 43% at the primary stage, 39% at the upper primary stage, 36% at the secondary stage and 34% at the higher level. Most of the gains of this expansion have gone to the children of the upper and middle classes in cities.

Interstate disparities are wide. High female literacy states (above 50%) have universalized primary enrolment among girls with the exception of the Union Territory of Chandigarh, where though the female literacy rate in 1991 was 74%, girls' enrolment in primary schools was only 59%. Girls' enrolment at the primary level is highest in Pondicherry, Lakshadweep, Mizoram, Goa, and Kerala. These states fare well at the upper primary level also. The gender gap in primary level enrolment is lowest in Kerala, Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Lakshdweep, and Delhi. In states where female literacy is low, girls' enrolment in primary schools is also poor, specially in Bihar, UP, Rajasthan, and Jammu and Kashmir. Half the country's population resides in these states.

Girls in rural areas are far behind those in cities. They constitute 74.1% of all girl students at the primary level but this drops to about 30% at the higher secondary level. Only 8.22% of villages are covered by secondary schools with the result that only 42% of girls in villages in the age group 10–14 attend schools and hardly any go to college. The state of many primary schools in villages is abysmal: there are no chairs, no tables, no blackboards, and no chalks, often no building. Teacher absenteeism is endemic and in Uttar Pradesh it is reported that two-thirds of the teachers fail to attend schools regularly. Even in schools where classes are regularly held, the quality of teaching leaves much to be desired.

While enrolment rates have increased, a large number of children drop out before even completing their primary education and the majority of these are girls. The drop out rate between classes I and V was 39.37% for girls in 1996–1997. For Scheduled Caste the figures in 1988–89 were 47% for boys and 55% for girls. In the same year, 64% S.T. boys and 70% girls enrolled in class I dropped out before class V. The reasons for the high dropout rate of girls are by now well known. Poverty compels girls to help in household work such as cooking, fetching water and fuel, looking after younger siblings, as well as earn an extra income by working outside the home. Early marriage is also a deterrent. According to the 42nd round of the National Sample Survey (July 1986 to June 1987), a little over one-fourth of all dropouts gave 'not interested in further education/ study' as the reason for leaving school. The curriculum is largely irrelevant specially for rural and urban poor children. Rural schools do not have toilets, and that is another reason why girls stop going to school, as they grow older. Poor facilities in schools, teacher absenteeism and indifference all contribute to children leaving school before even completing their primary education.

The strategies for attracting and retaining girls had been oft stated. They include reducing the cost of schooling, making schools more accessible so that girls do not have to walk long distances, increasing the number of women teachers, adopting more flexible schedules, providing mid-day meals as well toilets and making the curriculum more relevant. It is not that politicians and policy makers do not know what is to be done but they lack the will to implement policies.

Higher Education

The higher education system has grown steadily since independence. From 35 universities in 1947 and 700 colleges for general and professional education (1951), in 1996 there were 226 universities and institutions of national importance and over 9000 colleges. There was only one women's university at the time of independence, the SNDT Women's University; today there are five and 800 women's colleges that cater to nearly 50% of the girls enrolled in higher education. In a number of these colleges, however, teaching is of a poor standard, enrolment is low and they are financially not viable. However, according to the *India Today* League table, the top ranking college in India is Lady Shri Ram College in Delhi, a women's college. There has been some debate about whether there should be single sex schools and colleges. It has been argued that these are necessary, as many parents still do not wish to send their daughters to go to co-education institutions. Besides, girls often feel shy and diffident when studying with boys. Girls' schools and colleges give them greater confidence and scope for self-expression and participation in various extra curricular activities.

In 1996, there were 18.65 lakh girls enrolled in institutions of higher education. Kerala, as can be expected, had the highest enrolment of girls, 73.4% and Bihar the lowest, 16.9%. Though the total number of girls enrolled in science, engineering, technology and architecture has increased in the last fifty years, the percentage has not changed significantly in the last decade. In medicine, of the total enrolment in 1950–1951, only 6.6% were girls; the figure rose to 36.5% in 1993–1994 but declined to 34.5% in 1995–1996. One reason for this may be the capitation fees charged by a large number of private medical colleges and the unwillingness of many parents to spend so much on a daughter's education. In 1995-1996, girls formed about 41.5% of arts faculty students, 35.5% in science faculties and 29.0% in commerce. The only professional courses considered suitable for women, before 1947, were nursing, teaching, medicine and law. Today, there are numerous vocational and professional courses available to girls such as fashion technology, management, computer science, mass communication, interior designing, journalism, tourism, hotel management, secretarial course, etc. These courses are offered in institutes located in cities and are availed of mostly by middle class girls.

Educated Women in the Professions

While the number of women who go to schools and colleges has increased and so has the number of educated women who are employed outside the home, the percentage of the latter is surprisingly small. In 1993–1994, according to the 50th Round of the National Sample Survey, of women in rural areas who were matriculates, 19.81% were in the labour force, while only 14.31% of urban matriculate girls were employed. As for women graduates, 47.85% rural and 35.60% urban women were employed. Thus, about 65% of women who were graduates in cities were not working outside the home. This small number of educated women who seek or get jobs is not surprising as women's place in India, as elsewhere in the world, has traditionally been in the home and there are still prejudices against working women. In the nineteenth and early years of the twentieth century women, unlike men, did not go in for higher education as an avenue for employment.

In India, as in other countries, certain jobs were regarded as suitable for women. Medicine was one such profession. Among the earliest women doctors were Kadambini Ganguly, Anandibai Joshi, and Hilda Lazaraus. Dr. Lazarus was appointed assistant to the obstetrician and gynecologist at Lady Hardinge Medical College Hospital in Delhi in 1917 and became the first Indian woman to be appointed to the Women's Medical Service. After the First World War, in response to the demand for women doctors, science subjects were added to the curricula in women's colleges and more medical colleges admitted women. By 1929 nineteen medical schools and colleges admitted women and there was one medical college and four medical schools for women only.

Law was another profession regarded as suitable for women. Among the early women lawyers were Cornelia Sorabji who obtained a degree in jurisprudence from Oxford, Mithan Lam (Tata) and Avabai Wadia (Mehta) both Barristers of Law from London.

Teaching has been a popular profession, particularly at the school level, and women formed 29.47% of primary, 33.7% of middle, and 31.20% of higher secondary school teachers in 1991–1992. Rural areas continue to face acute shortage of female teachers and at the primary stage in villages; the proportion of women teachers is only 21% as against 56% in cities. In colleges and universities, the number of women teachers declines as we go up the hierarchy. According to a study done on *Women in Higher Education Management in India* by the Commonwealth Secretariat and UNESCO in 1993, 7% of professors, 22% associate professors, 38% of assistant professors, 56% lecturers and 61% of instructors are women. Women are grossly under-represented in higher education management. Of the university-level institutions, only 6% have women vice chancellors, 21% have women senior administrators and 10% have women heads of departments and principals of constituent colleges.

Women and Development

It is now widely recognized that of the several areas for women's advance, education is one of the most important. Demographers have put forward strong cross-country evidence that increased schooling is positively associated with reduced fertility. In India, according to the Census of 1981, total fertility was 5.1 for women with no education, 4.5 for women with primary education, and 3.1 for those with secondary education, and 2.1 for those with tertiary education. Recently published results of the 1992–1993 National Family Health Survey for all the major states confirm the strong effects of literacy and primary education on fertility. While the determinants of differences in fertility rates are complex and not fully understood, one intervening factor is the increase in the age of marriage, which rises with the level of education. Declining fertility rates also change the amount and distribution of resources for education. Between 1960 and 1980, the share of the population of children below the age of 15 fell from 43% to 34% in Thailand. During the 1980s the growth rate of population in the age group 6–11 in countries of South East Asia was very low. With a declining or slowly growing school age population, a country can spend more on each student and provide better quality education.

There is also a strong relation between women's education and child mortality. Interestingly, it has been noticed that mothers' education has an even greater effect on the survival of daughters. Studies have shown that schooling improves a mother's childcare skills, domestic management of sickness and ill health and efforts at preventive care and increases immunization rates. Mothers' schooling also influences children's nutritional status. A study of two villages in West Bengal showed that children of literate mothers had a higher nutritional intake than children of illiterate mothers.

While access to schools, enrolment and retention are no doubt important, the content of education is equally crucial. Education must improve women's skills so that they are not confined to low paid and unskilled or semi skilled jobs. It is, therefore, important to have vocational and industrial training institutes and polytechnics for girls.

Investment in women's education shows useful returns as it has a positive effect in improving health care, increasing immunization and female longevity, reducing infant and maternal mortality, decreasing the birth rate and enhancing the readiness to send girls to school. Among its economic effects are a greater readiness to mobilize credit and willingness to use banks and readiness to establish co-operatives and small business enterprises. But a woman's education is above all important because it enriches her personality and should give her greater self-confidence, economic independence and ability to take part in decision making both at home and in the public sphere. Textbooks and curriculum have an important role to play in giving the girl child a positive self-image. They have to reflect these values and teachers have to be gender sensitized. Efforts are being made to remove gender bias from textbooks. Education by itself may not raise a woman's status within the family or society but it certainly helps in doing so.

In the Census of 2001, the number of female illiterates was 189,554,866. While there has been a spectacular growth in the number of schools, colleges and universities and enrolment has increased at all levels, the growth has not been even. The gains of this expansion have gone more to certain regions, communities, castes, and income groups and to boys rather than girls. More girls today go to school and college than they did 150 years ago, but still 60% of Indian women are illiterate and 38.57% of those who join class I drop out before completing class V. As we have seen, poverty, irrelevance of the curriculum, teacher absenteeism, lack of infrastructure such as building, equipment, toilets, poor quality teaching all contribute to children leaving school even before they complete the primary stage. As children drop out, the number of illiterates continues to grow. While numerous adult literacy programmes have been launched in the last decade, achievements have fallen far short of expectations. For the poor literacy is often not the first priority. As some village women elected to the panchayats said: "You ask us to send our children to school but education won't provide food…We need food first, which only money can buy, then knowledge afterwards. Our children won't become barristers, judges or doctors. There are dozens of educated boys in our villages who are unemployed. Even if our boys go to high school and college they will not get jobs and once educated, they do not want to come back to the village and help their parents in farm work. Girls will get married and go away. So what is the point in educating our children? Is it not better for them to start earning for the family?"

The condition of most government and municipal schools in India is appalling. Better quality education in these schools holds the key to higher literacy and a higher quality of life. There has been a substantial gap between rhetoric and achievement. It is partly a question of resources, partly a consequence of the sheer size of the population of which three quarters lives in rural areas, and a substantial number below the poverty line. The lack of implementation of policies is also the result of an absence of commitment and political will to do so. The complex relationship between caste, class and gender also plays a role. Despite all words to the contrary, successive governments in the pre-colonial and post-colonial periods have failed to fulfill their educational commitments specially to women despite the wide recognition that women's education is the "key of keys" to bring about a social revolution.

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CHAPTER 10

Women and Formal and Informal Science

Anil K. Gupta and R.A. Mashelkar

Intuition is to science what the soul is to body. If intuition is a feminine attribute, then feminine science is expected to be more intuitive and accommodative of many other ways of enquiry, which might appear 'unscientific' to begin with. There is a strong case for increasing women's share in the scientific institutions and professions. This case might at first sight appear to rest entirely on the grounds of fairness and equal opportunity. But that is not all. The contention in this paper is that the quality of discourse and institutional environment in which scientific enquiries are pursued might get significantly changed if more women participate in scientific pursuits. Further, it is not just the participation of women, which will bring science and society together but also the feminine qualities, which many male scientists may need to possess, which will help in this goal. There will always be questions in science, which would remain unaffected by the gender of a researcher. However, the fact is that the constraints under which women professionals have to balance their multiple roles at home and in the laboratory could lead to an appreciation of the constraints faced by users of science. But evidence on this account is mixed. There are many scholars who have argued that there could be unique perspectives that women scientists may bring to bear on a problem whereas there is an equally large number who think otherwise. Even if there is nothing unique that they may contribute, the case for increasing their participation in every human endeavour including science remains extremely persuasive. But what are the ground realities about the actual participation?

'Woman is the companion of man, gifted with equal mental capabilities. She has the right to participate in the minutest details, in the activities of man, and she has an equal right of freedom and liberty with them', said Mahatma Gandhi. But the realities in India tell a different story. R.A. Mashelkar identified a five point agenda or what he called a new '*Panchsheel*' for the new millennium, in his Presidential address at Indian Science Congress, January 3, 2000. The agenda included child-centred education, woman-centred family, human-centred development, knowledge-centred society and innovation-centred India. He observed:

> Recently, the Hon'ble President of India said 'The best symbol of female values that has been created by nature is in the form of 'mother'. Mother is 'creativity' and 'innovation' personified in solving human problems in the family. She represents excellence, morality, equality not in material terms but as a living cultural symbol practicing these values. Out of all the management experiences in business, industry, public service and society, mother is the best manager nature has created. Mother's instinct has sustained Mother India. It is more specific than the word 'culture' itself. The growing alienation between man and society, which modern-day management practices have to contend with, may find its solution in the management practices which derive strength from the way a mother manages her family in small and big ways i.e. Mother culture![1]

And yet harsh statistics stare us in the face. About 70 per cent of Indian women are illiterate. Ninety per cent of family planning operations are tubectomies. And sixty per cent of primary school dropouts are girls.[2] Sharp gender inequalities with unequal pay for equal work, discrimination in the labour market and so on are grim realities in today's India.[3]

Although academically women have excelled in the last decade or so in practically all the disciplines of science, they are grossly under-represented in science and technology in India at various levels. The share of women in higher education in arts and education has increased from 36 and 29 per cent in 1974–1975 to about 48, and 50 per cent in 1999–2000. But in science subjects, the situation is very different. Their share in science, agriculture, veterinary science, medicine and engineering has changed from 32, 1, 1, 20 and 35 per cent respectively to 35, 10, 12, 32, and 16 per cent respectively over the same period (see Table 1), i.e. just a three per cent increase over twenty years in science subjects. The major choice of the subject for women scientists continues to be life science. It has also been noted that whereas two thirds of the working women scientists are engaged in teaching, hardly three per cent go for R&D (see Table 2),[4] and a very insignificant percentage gets engaged in industrial production, managerial and entrepreneurship (see Table 3).[5]

Advances in life sciences have placed in the hands of women opportunities that were unheard of earlier. However, technology is a double-edged weapon and if not well used, its advance can hurt the cause of women. For instance, today's technology enables the determination of the sex of a child during pregnancy. It was shocking to hear recently about some statistics on the number of pregnancy terminations, which in the case of the female child far exceeded that of the male child – and this was not in a village but in a metropolitan city.[6] The enactment of new laws, which will arrest this process of sex determination, is a welcome step.

There is an immediate need to reaffirm and reiterate the necessity for action regarding the participation of women in the decision-making process related to science and technology, including in planning and setting priorities for research and development, and in the choice, acquisition, adaptation, innovation and application of science and technology for development. Also research and development serving women's needs should be given high priority. Conscious policies should be adopted to promote research

Table 1

Faculty-wise Enrolment of Women in Higher Education from 1974 to 1999–2000

('000)

Year	Arts	Commerce	Law	Education	Science	Agri.	Vety. Sc.	Medicine	Engg.	Others	Total
1974-75	363 (34.0)	22.1 (5.6)	5.9 (4.4)	29 (37.6)	106.2 (22.9)	0.3 (0.9)	0.08 (1.2)	21 (19.7)	1.3 (1.5)	4.1 (32.6)	553 (23.4)
1979-80	397.9 (37.0)	68 (13.2)	11 (6.2)	34.5 (47.3)	140.1 (27.5)	1.1 (2.8)	0.2 (2.7)	24.4 (21.8)	4.4 (3.7)	7.4 (38.8)	689 (26.0)
1985-86	576.3 (39.3)	156.7 (20.0)	17.6 (9.0)	38.6 (46.7)	215.7 (30.8)	2.3 (5.6)	0.6 (7.0)	37.5 (30.5)	12.2 (6.9)	9 (38.0)	1067.5 (29.6)
1986-87	628 (41.4)	162 (19.7)	18.3 (9.2)	43.6 (50.5)	231.1 (31.4)	2.5 (5.9)	0.7 (7.0)	38.9 (30.5)	12.7 (6.9)	11 (38.6)	1148.8 (30.6)
1987-88	671.1 (42.4)	172.2 (20.1)	19.2 (9.3)	46.3 (51.5)	245.7 (32.0)	2.7 (6.2)	0.7 (7.2)	40.5 (30.9)	13.6 (7.1)	12.2 (38.9)	1224.2 (31.3)
1988-89	706.9 (42.9)	182 (20.4)	20 (9.4)	48.8 (52.0)	259.1 (32.4)	2.8 (6.5)	0.8 (7.4)	43.2 (31.5)	14.6 (7.3)	13.4 (39.1)	1291.8 (31.7)
1989-90	748.9 (43.6)	192 (20.6)	21.8 (9.8)	50.7 (52.9)	274.5 (32.9)	3.1 (6.9)	0.9 (7.9)	45.3 (31.9)	15.8 (7-6)	14.4 (39.2)	1367.4 (32.2)
1990-91	784.4 (44.0)	201.7 (20.8)	23.5 (10.0)	53.2 (5-3.4)	289.4 (33.3)	3.4 (7.2)	0.9 (8.2)	48.6 (32.3)	17.1 (7.9)	14.7 (39-4)	1436.9 (32.5)
1991-92	824.9 (44.2)	212 (21.0)	24.9 (10.0)	58.1 (54.8)	302 (33.5)	3.6 (7.5)	0.9 (8.6)	51.1 (32.6)	18.3 (8.1)	15.1 (39.7)	1512.2 (32.8)
1992-93	867.5 (44.6)	222 (21.2)	26.2 (10.3)	61.1 (55.3)	318.6 (33.8)	3.8 (7.6)	1 (8.7)	53.8 (32.9)	19.2 (8.2)	15.9 (40.0)	1590.3 (33.1)
1993-94	905.1 (38.5)	235.3 (18.4)	30 (9.7)	65.1 (48.7)	334.4 (29.3)	%	%	%	20 (7.1)	74.1* (23.2)	1664.1 (28.6)
1994-95	1123.2 (45.4)	292 (21.8)	37.3 (11.5)	80.8 (57.5)	415 (34.6)	%	%	%	24.9 (8.3)	91.9* (27.3)	2065 (33.8)
1995-96	1191.8 (47.4)	309.8 (22.0)	39.6 (10.8)	85.7 (58.0)	440.4 (34.9)	%	%	%	26.4 (8.4)	97.6* (27.4)	2191.3 (34.1)
1996-97	1252.7 (45.9)	325.7 (22.0)	41.7 (11.6)	90.1 (58.0)	462.9 (35.0)	%	%	%	27.6 (8.3)	102.5* (27.1)	2303.2 (34.1)
1997-98	1330.5 (46.5)	332.6 (21.5)	48.9 (13.0)	83.2 (51.1)	469.6 (33.8)	14.7 (18.9)	2.4 (11.3)	80.7 (33.5)	51.3 (14.8)	31.8 (56.2)	2445.7 (34.6)
1998-99	1400.3 (46.7)	350.1 (21.5)	51.5 (13.1)	87.5 (51.3)	494.2 (34.1)	15.4 (18.9)	2.6 (11.7)	84.9 (33.7)	54.1 (14.9)	33.5 (56.5)	2574 (36.3)
1999-00	1489.5 (47.40)	381.4 (22.5)	54.8 (13.6)	87.6 (49.2)	520.9 (35.2)	15.5 (19.1)	2.7 (11.6)	90.5 (32.4)	63.1 (16.2)	35.6 (42.9)	2741.6 (35.6)

Abbr.: Agri. : Agriculture.
Vety.Sc.: Veterinary Sciences.
Engg.: Engineering and Technology.

Note: *Include Agriculture, Veterinary and Medicine.

%: Data included elsewhere with another category.

Figures in parantheses indicate the enrolment of women as a percentage of total enrolment.

Source: Research and Development Statistics 2000-01, Ministry of Science and Technology, Govt. of India.

Table 2
Full Time Equivalent of Women Employed in Research and Development Establishments (as on 1.4.1996 & 1.4.1998)

(Number)

Establishment	Personnel engaged primarily in R&D activities	Personnel engaged in auxiliary activities	Personnel engaged in administrative activities	Total
1.4.1998				
Institutional Sector				
Major Scientific Agencies	3840	5025	7535	16400
Central Government Ministries/ Departments	846	899	1547	3292
State Governments	1614	1836	6466	9916
Total Institutional Sector	6300	7760	15548	29608
Industrial Sector				
Public Sector Including Joint Sector	800	234	517	1551
Private Sector	2601	2163	1750	6514
Total Industrial Sector	3401	2397	2267	8065
Total*	9701	10157	17815	37673
1.4.1996				
Institutional Sector				
Major Scientific Agencies	4994	3592	5687	14273
Central Government Ministries/ Departments	705	873	1885	3463
State Governments	2513	2086	6313	10912
Total Institutional Sector	8212	6551	13885	28648
Industrial Sector				
Public Sector Including Joint Sector	774	291	363	1428
Private Sector	2092	2279	1734	6105
Total Industrial Sector	2866	2570	2097	7533
Total*	11078	9121	15982	36181

Abbr.: R&D: Research and Development.

Note: * Total of Institutional Sector & Industrial Sector.

1.4.1998: Data for private sector refer to 1144 in-house R&D units including 176 SIRO units.

1.4.1996: Data for private sector refer to 1149 in house R&D units including 159 SIRO units.

Data do not include Small Scale Industries (SSI) and Higher Education.

Source: Research and Development Statistics 2000-01 & Past Issue. Ministry of Science and Technology, Govt. of India.

Table 3
Women Employment
Figures at all India level

Industry-wise Women Employment in the Organized Sector

Employment (In ' 000)

Industry	(As on 31.3.1998)			(As on 31.3.1999)			Percentage Change		
	Public Sector	Private Sector	Total	Public Sector	Private Sector	Total	Public Sector	Private Sector	Total
Agriculture, Hunting Forestry & Fishing	47.5	442.5	490	45.8	425.7	471.5	–3.6	–3.8	–3.8
Mining & Quarrying	58.3	12.7	71	58.2	10.4	68.6	–0.3	–17.8	–3.4
Manufacturing	105.5	930.6	1036.1	101.1	933.3	1034.4	–4.2	0.3	–0.2
Electricity, Gas & Water	41.7	1.4	43.2	42.8	1	43.8	2.4	–30.6	1.3
Construction	60.7	6.3	66.9	63.2	5.3	68.5	4.2	–16.2	2.3
Wholesale & Retail Trade & Restaurants and Hotels	16.3	27.4	43.7	16.6	27.4	44	1.9	–0.1	0.7
Transport, Storage & Communications	168.4	6.1	174.5	171.3	6.7	178	1.7	8.9	2
Financing, Insurance Real Estate & Business Services	177.9	48.8	226.8	178.7	55.6	234.3	0.4	13.9	3.3
Community, Social & Personal Services	2086.4	535.1	2621.5	2133.1	553.1	2686.2	2.2	3.4	2.5
Total	2762.7	2010.9	4773.6	2810.7	2018.4	4829.2	1.7	0.4	1.2

Source: Employment Review, January-March 1999, Directorate General of Employment and Training, Ministry of Labour Government of India.

and development that aims at relieving women from time and energy consuming and under-productive work, meeting their health and nutritional needs and promoting their general well-being.

At the most fundamental level, we will have to focus on improving the female literacy rate; ensuring equal access of girls to existing school facilities; minimizing the dropout of girl students; encouraging the participation of girls and women in existing technical training and vocational training programmes; and increasing educational and particularly scientific and technical education and training facilities for girls and women. But these measures will not succeed completely unless the institutional environment in which women scientists have to work also is modified. It is this goal which will require changes in the mindset and socio-cultural norms of our country. India, we are confident, is capable of attempting this change.

SAGA OF EXCLUSION: STUDIES ON WOMEN IN SCIENCE

There are several strands of thought in the literature on women and science and some are quite well known and familiar such as:

(a) Strong economic and cultural barriers to the entry of women in higher science education within science, the barriers also exist for entry into different disciplines. Some of these barriers are psychological and some are institutional. For instance, some of the male heads of departments use their own biases not to encourage girls from pursuing certain disciplines or problem areas.

(b) Indian scientists in general are westward looking and Indian women scientists are no exception. The parameters of success for many might be similar to the male scientists. There is no evidence that women scientists are more responsive to societal concerns and empathize more with scientific and technological problems of the disadvantaged sections of society or evaluate their success in terms of the social problems they solve.

(c) Marriage based transfers, household chores and filial responsibilities weigh rather heavily on most women scientists and thus their ability to progress, even after they enter science, is generally restricted (sometimes because of their own constraints and many times because of the lack of a supportive peer culture). Sometimes they internalize the constraints by saying, “I am not ambitious”.[7] The lack of achievements gets explained internally, or is internalized as something inherent in their way of doing things or responding to life.

(d) Formal scientific research has seen very many important contributions by some of the outstanding women scientists,[8] but did their being women affect the quality or the direction of science they pursued? Some feminist critiques have implied that the male domination of science in the western mould has made it far too dispassionately tool-oriented, more materialistic and less concerned for underprivileged. What is the evidence that in the hands of women, the scientific tools acquired a more humane touch? If such is not the case, then perhaps the more important issue is that women's presence needs to be high in science regardless of whether that will affect the content or quality of science. Though in some cases it might affect the outcomes (an unfair system, in terms of women's participation, can surely not produce fair outcomes).

(e) Profiles of pioneers like Anna Mani are a beacon of hope particularly when they deny discrimination, refuse to see any connection between their being women on their role as a scientist, and underline the social and family privileges which helped them grow.[9] But even Anna Mani recalls the times when some male peers or superiors tried to highlight the mistakes of women students or scientists out of context and disproportionately. Professional seclusion is often forced upon even such pioneering scientists, because there are fewer women peers of that class. Socialization with male colleagues has its own attendant implications in the Indian mindset. Having worked with Sir C.V. Raman, Anna experienced Raman's biases no differently than any other women scientist. But being a believer in gender neutrality in science, she somehow never saw the need to promote women while selecting candidates in various positions.[10]

(f) We have Bhama Srinivasan, Aarti Prabhakar, Radha Basu (one among the top 25 women on the Web, 2000).[11] But they are so few and far apart that the story of Indian women in science is a story of indifference, neglect, and lack of sufficient encouragement to them to advance.[12] A small part of this story should be explained by the fact that the story of women in science is perhaps not very different from the story of women in other professions (except a few like nursing where they dominate).

The journey of women scientists/natural philosophers like Gargi, and Maitreyi to Geervani[13] and Indira Nath[14] (recipient of Loral award 2002), is a long one. But the new 'social contract'[15] that women scientists are supposed to bying about between the society and science is yet to be witnessed. The Third World Organization of Women in Science (1999) observed in a statement,

> Notwithstanding the lack of comprehensive and reliable statistical data, we testify our preoccupation at the heavy difficulties still encountered by women in accessing the domains of S&T; on the other hand, we testify that women play crucial roles in the preservation of norms, values and practices that richly endow the diverse societies of the world and are fundamental to human existence. Since S&T have become major influences in our times, it is urgent that women come to the forefront to participate in shaping the agenda for the future direction of the scientific enterprise. The creation of TWOWS was inspired by the conviction that women have a unique and valuable perspective to bear upon the application of S&T to development, a conviction that has been reconfirmed by the debates and the outcome of the present Conference.

In a study it was noted[16] that curriculum developed by Women's Studies professionals (led by Maithreyi Krishnaraj in this case[17]) with respect to women's studies paid no attention to women as creative knowledge workers or innovators, or in other words, problem solvers. This is evident from the lack of many studies on creative and innovative technological contributions by women. We are not saying that concern for women should be shown by women only, but we do feel that there is a perspective that women scholars might have brought to bear on the role of women in science.

The role of women in science needs proper appreciation and recognition. Barriers to their entry, inclusion and upward movement need to be removed. But at the same time, not many women scientists might like to move up because they were women (rather than being better scientists). The social recognition and mindset, which tend to belittle their achievements when they do make it, are a major barrier and that needs a careful handling. Social pressures, which segregate women and thus come in the way of forming similar social networks that male scientists make, also affect the peer support that they are able to harness in their work than, say, male scientists.

But a study of women above hundred years of age under way at SRISTI (Society for Research and Initiatives for Sustainable Technologies and Institutions)[18] has thrown up some interesting insights about the "informal" scientists. The ease with which the centurion women carry stress and perform their multiple roles without feeling too great about it, without seeking sympathy and without suffering from victim's perspectives is noticeable. Their insights about nature and resources they handle are also very important. But if women were not given the tools of the trade like carpentry or black smithy for centuries, it is natural, is not it, that they learned to cope with inefficiencies rather than attempting to transcend them? Women tend to be very creative in coping (a cultural legacy as well) rather than transcending these constraints in many domains. They are encultured from an early age that they were supposed to adapt and adjust and this almost becomes their second nature. But some of them who have an opportunity to be "scouted", "supported" and "sighted" do demonstrate that their creativity need not be less than their male counterparts; at least in informal science.

Autumn Stanley, in her much neglected masterpiece, *Mothers and Daughters of Invention*, lamented at the share of women patent holders which was less than one per cent during 1809–1985 in the USA. She shows how many times men were given credit for the inventions by their wives.[19] This number has increased to about 4–8 per cent (by different estimates). Her contention is that women invent. There is no question of that. But they are not recognized as inventors.[20] It is an extraordinary study of women's creativity and inventiveness. And yet, despite the fact that the author spent thirteen years to write this book, and provided unassailable evidence of how women invented new technologies during the last 200 hundred years in USA, the work has remained obscure. It is not only that women's creativity is ignored, even evidence about this is ignored.

And could we disagree with this? Our specific suggestion would be that we need to take steps to increase their participation and visibility in formal and informal scientific expeditions. But the major socio-cultural problem might still remain, as Raman would remark when he saw male and female scientists socializing, "scandalous".[21] However, this has become less of a problem today. Social space for women scientists is expanding in professions and also perhaps in male minds.

GENDERIZATION OF SCIENCE

Even if it is argued that the direction, nature and quality of scientific pursuits would be no different whether the investigator was a male or a female scholar, the case for increasing space for women in scientific enterprises stands. The social discrimination against women begins at an early age in Indian society. Right from the childhood a girl is always counselled to learn to be patient, to adapt, adjust and submit. After all, she was supposed to change her home after marriage and spend a major part of life in her adopted family. In addition, preference for the male child and discrimination in his favour is an everyday experience for a girl. The social safety or lack of it becomes another constraint when she grows up and recognizes that she cannot move around as freely as the boys in the family or neighbourhood. The dropout rate of children, and within them girl children, continues to be very high from primary school onwards. A few that reach the portals of colleges and universities face further constraints.

The historical bias in favour of male scientists gets reinforced through various institutional and non-institutional channels. The scientific enterprise cannot grow without dialogue, collaboration and knowledge networking. With increasing complexity in scientific enquiries, the possibility of a scientist ploughing a lonely furrow is becoming less and less feasible. Our social customs and cultural taboos inhibit many initiatives that a woman scientist must take to make robust enquiries and pursue collaborative research. In the patrifocal society the conflicts between the three roles of mother, wife and professional have to be resolved everyday. The situation becomes more complex when some of the male scientists find it difficult to maintain boundaries of their roles, while pursuing professional enquiries. The predatory environment has become less so with increasing awareness among male scientists and self-empowerment of women professionals. But, the problem remains.

Some scholars believe that Women's Studies have now to grapple with the issue of 'women seeking equality at work and home' as compared to the earlier model of 'educated woman as deviant reconciling dual conflicting roles'.[22] We may not agree with the extreme eco-feminist view that western science produces "technologies that are violent, invasive and therefore sexist and racist",[23] and that greater participation by women would change the direction of technology development significantly. If such was the case, the nature of technologies both in the formal and informal sectors should have been significantly different in matrifocal societies. Such has not been the evidence. Biases exist in formal science and these biases often work against the incorporation of people's knowledge and within them, the women's knowledge. But that these biases are gendered in nature has not been conclusively proved. The nature of scientific questions and their implications for society have not been shown to be different when pursued by women scientists. In fact, in a study of women moneylenders vis-à-vis male moneylenders, Gupta observed little difference in the method of exploitation of poor people by moneylenders just because of their gender. If anything, because of a more intimate knowledge of the personal conditions, the methods of rent extraction by women moneylenders were perhaps more ingenious.[24] The debate on this issue of science being differently pursued by women as against men has not been resolved. Quoting many western scientists,[25] Subrahmanyan recognizes that by removing masculine bias from science, it would not get 'purified'.[26]

The structure of scientific institutions, criteria of appraisal and processes of decision making would create their own logic whether in the hands of men or women. The contribution of people's knowledge, creativity and innovation was recognized for the first time in the 87 year old history of Indian Science Congress in Pune in 2000 by R.A. Mashelkar, a male scientist,[27] though Indian Science Congress had women scientists as leaders in the past. It is no reflection on those outstanding women scientists who chaired the Science Congress. The fact is that even the other male scientists did not pay attention to this issue of building bridges with people's knowledge either before or after this Congress. The reason is not that the women would not have liked the scientific and technological constraints to be overcome particularly when faced by them for so long. The historical reality is that they were denied the skills and tools of, say, black smithy, carpentry, or casting, etc., such that they could not innovate tools to overcome their drudgery. The male bias in science and technology cannot be denied. But, the answer will have to go beyond getting more women in science. The very basis of scientific enquiry, influenced as it is by the design of scientific institutions, the incentives and disincentives for promotion and recognition, would have to be modified. And this task would need to be pursued by men scientists more than the women scientists. If technological problems of women did not get resolved for so long, it is not the responsibility of women scientists alone to resolve this now. The share of women in technological disciplines continues to be extremely low.[28] If this argument was allowed to persist, there would be a double fault. First we create barriers and stereotypes that prevent women from entering science and then expect them to solve those problems which male dominated science could not address adequately for so long.

WOMEN AND INFORMAL SCIENCE: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY BY HONEY BEE NETWORK

The farmers, home makers, artisans and healers include many 'informal' scientists and technologists. Their representation in the total pool of knowledge experts scouted by Honey Bee network is quite small.[29] This is not because they are less creative but because of the lack of women field staff and volunteers, who could scout women knowledge experts and 'scientists' and 'technologists'.

Sitaben, a healer from Dangs forests in south Gujarat was honoured at the Honey Bee annual function a couple of years ago by the award of SRISTI Samman for her knowledge as well as her spirit of service. She was one of the very few (and in that village the only one) expert woman herbal healers in that region in the tribal district of Dangs, Gujarat. She had learned it from her brother and had developed considerable reputation in solving problems of people in the nearby region (see Table 4). At the award function she was exposed to a lot of attention, adulation, crowd and noise. When she went back, she got slightly disoriented. As soon as The Honey Bee network and SRISTI learned about it, they took her to a local clinic and she had to be treated for a few weeks for this psychological stress.[30]

Table 4
Some Indigenous Medications Prescribed by Sitaben Gaikwad

Note: The most preferred line of treatment for a particular ailment is tabulated. Sitaben has several alternative herbs, which she prescribes if the diagnosis and prognosis warrant. A few example of the diseases that she treats is given below. The exact proportion of each ingredient was not possible because over a period of time, Sitaben has developed her own measure of approximation. Furthermore, identification of all plants used was not possible because of the limited time frame of the study. For identification of each plant, flowers of each plant are required. All the plant names are in Dangi (the local tribal dialect)

Complaint	Herb/s employed (native name and botanical identification)	Directions
Vomiting and diaorrhea	Aawal (Cassia auriculata[1,2,3])	Boil bark in water to prepare decoction
	Bark of Ragatrohido (*Tecomella undulata*), root of Nagar veil (*Piper betel*[3]), bark of Ambla (*Phyllanthus emblica*[1,2,3]), bark of Bili (*Aegle marmelos*), root of Vatham chhod, bark of Kamal zad, Tuber of Kachhuro	Take 50 g each of Ragatrohido, ambla, bili, kamal zad barks, nagar veil and vatham chhod roots and kachhuro tuber. Boil in 2 L water till volume is half. One teaspoonful of decoction taken twice a day to relieve symptoms.
Jaundice	Tetu, Nilsoti (*Oroxylon indicun*[1,2,3])	Bark and leaves are boiled and the filtrate is used.
Pain while urinating	Bhutiya alan (*Oroxylon indicum*[1])	Grinded bark is mixed with sugar
Do	Ragat rohido Kharato and Jambudo (*Tecomella undulata*[2,3], *Syzygium cumini*[2])	50 g, 25 g and 25 g, respectively, are ground and boiled with 500 ml water till it remains 100 ml. Drink this once in a day for 3-4 days
Fever in children	Nilsoti leaves (*Dalbergia volubilis*[1,3])	Boil leaves in water to prepare decoction and filter out sediments. Massage child's body with a few drops of the liquor
	Shiri (*Albizia lebbeck*[1,2,3]), Fok (*Securinega leucopyrus*[4])	Crush shiri leaves and mix powdered roots of Fok tree
Acidity	Karav roots (*Achyranthes aspera*[1,2,3])	Crush roots and dilute juice in water and drink it.
Asthma	Shirish Bark (*Albizia lebbeck*[1,2,3])	Powder bark
Bleeding Wound	Burandi (*Barleria prionitis*[3]) Mokha (*Schrebera swietenioides*[3])	Powder bark. Sprinkle over wound to stop bleeding. Also expedites healing of wound.

She has recovered and resumed normal functions now of collecting firewood from the forest, dispensing medicines to the needy, and collecting other forest products. The question is how to coordinate the two worlds of knowledge and acknowledgement? The subtlety of a tribal culture was absent perhaps in the function. The organizers were perhaps too loud and seemed less authentic. It created a stress. May be this is an extreme case.[31] But building bridges between formal and informal science and technology would require paying attention to such subtleties. Even empowerment of such knowledge-rich, economically poor, isolated and expert women required much greater sensitivity than had been shown by us.

Can women only cope and not create? Why are there so few women innovators?[32] Here we would like to share with our readers some of the findings of our empirical research. The Honey Bee network has been very self critically reflecting on the fact that the share of women innovators and traditional knowledge holders in our database of over fifteen thousand innovations and traditional knowledge mobilized by National Innovation Foundation (NIF) directly and through Honey Bee network has not been more than five per cent. This certainly reflects more on our incapacity and inadequacy than any innate inability of women to innovate. This was the case despite incorporating the resolve of women, 'if given some space to stand, they would move the world', in SRISTI's logo.

We had argued earlier that given the cultural context, a girl was taught from an early age to adapt, adjust and accommodate, since she was supposed to go to 'another' house after marriage. The general thrust towards compliance and conformity so deeply embedded in our culture was particularly underlined in the case of women. The women tended to be very creative in coping with stresses of various kinds. Historically, they were not given tools of black smithy and carpentry such that even if they felt dissatisfied with the given technologies of daily use, they did not have wherewithal to transcend the constraints. The everyday technologies used by women seemed to have had much lesser technological innovations, thanks to the neglect by men artisans and scientific minds. Thus, we felt that there indeed were fewer innovations attempted by women, given the cultural, political and economic constraints under which they worked.

But then we also knew all along that no two women cooked the same recipe or dish alike. The stamp of personality of a lady was almost always imprinted on the way a dish was cooked. And this happened every time she cooked that particular dish. This indicated enormous degree of creativity, far higher than evident in any other human activity. Male farmers, or artisans or technologists would not be able to claim so much uniqueness in any human endeavour. Why did we miss it then so much?

We used several explanations: that we had much lesser number of lady researchers who were willing to go from village to village looking for odd balls, the women experimenters and inventors; the male researchers had difficulty in approaching women in the villages particularly in the absence of the men folk at home; the biases of the researchers; and men often dissuaded field workers from looking for new ideas from women, since after all they (the men) knew all! And these seemed to become less and less acceptable as time passed. But our pedagogies seemed to have internalized various constraints rather than transcending them. Were we not behaving like the subject of inquiry ourselves, we were coping rather than being creative? Very slowly, as this realization dawned, our methods started becoming more creative.

We started having Shodh Yatras[33] involving walk through a number of villages for eight to ten days.[34] The idea was to honour the innovators and traditional knowledge experts at their door steps and share the experiences of innovators walking with us. Our hope was and is, that society would become innovative once inertia was overcome through presentation of real life examples of those who had done so in their neighbourhood as well as in far away regions. During these Yatras, we also organized contests among women to cook recipes that had at least some uncultivated ingredients. The contests threw up women's innovations as well as outstanding traditional knowledge in utilizing lesser known biodiversity and meet nutritional and food requirements in normal times but particularly in stress periods like droughts and floods. We have now a large collection of such recipes (see Tables 5 and 6), many of which can put the best chef to shame in their ingenuity and taste. For instance, we came across a delicious vegetable cooked out of leaves of Euphorbia in a recent Shodh Yatra. Who would imagine that the few leaves that this cactus bears could be put to such delicious use?[35] It is a different matter that while this plant may be neglected in India, it is a rich source of anti-cancer drugs abroad.[36]

The biodiversity contest among young children also brought out several such uses. When we organized biodoversity contests among school children it was found that girl children knew more than boys in primary classes but as they moved to classes six or seven, they knew half as much as boys did, apparently because their freedom to move about outside the home was curtailed, and also their responsibility to look after younger kids increased. Discrimination in learning opportunities vis-à-vis boys began early for Indian girls.

While we pursued this and several other approaches including organizing specific meetings of only women experimenters, we adjusted to the fact that in most Shodh Yatras participation of women in various villages was much lower than men and often negligible in some villages. In the summer of 2001, in Alwar district, Rajasthan we decided that it was time to change. Right from the first, in two villages, Bhikampur and Surajgadh, we decided to try out something different. We would start interactions by showing the multimedia multi-language database on innovations which always attracted very high attention. Invariably in every meeting there would be only men and children. After showing a few innovations, we stopped and insisted that unless women were invited to the meeting, we were not going to show any further. We were told that women were busy, that they had gone out (if it was afternoon time), and that the men would tell them whatever they saw. But we remained adamant and were pleasantly surprised that the approach worked in every single case during the recent Shodh Yatra. We not only could share with women what we knew but also learn from them a great deal about their own concerns, and creative approaches for solving their problems, through more of the former than of the latter. This was very inspiring but also very embarrassing. Why had we adapted to the absence of women even in a single meeting during previous seven Shodh Yatras?

There is no doubt that women excel in certain fields of knowledge domains in which they have greater familiarity and control. Whether it is the seed selection[37] or storage in agriculture,[38] child care[39] or women's own health problems, the knowledge of women is indeed far superior and extensive compared to that of men.

Table 5
List of Plants Used in Recipe Contest During Shodh Yatra 2.

Route: Amirgadh village to Tundia village in Palanpura taluka (Balaram-Ambaji sanctuary) of Banaskantha district.
Date: 31-12-1998 to 6-1-1999

No.	Name	Village		Recipe	*Name of Ingredients*		
					Local	Common	Scientific
1	Laliben Rajabhai Gamar	Gavra	(i)	Curry of Bokhana vegetable	Bokhana	*Bokhana*	*Commelina benghalensis*
2	Ramiben Hirabhai Gamar	Gavra	(i)	Vegetable of Karamada (berries)	Karamada	Karamada	*Carissa carandas*
3	Jamnaben Shantibhai Gamar	Gavra	(i)	Vegetable of Fang with mango, butter-milk, sour tamarind etc.	Fang	Fang	*hypocrateriformis* *Rivea*
4	Soniben Sabalabhai Gamar	Gavra	(i)	Vegetable of Goonda (berries) leaves	Gunda	Gunda	*Cordia mixa*
5	Dhuliben Gulbhai Gamar	Gavra	(i)	Vegetable of Rajka (Alfalfa)	Rajka	Rajka	*Medicago sativa*
6	Premiben Bhomabhai Gamar	Gavra	(i)	Vegetable of Velodi arvensis	Velodi	Velodi	Convolvulus
			(ii)	Vegetable of Goras Ambli	Goras Ambli	Goras Ambli	*Pithecellobium dulce*
			(iii)	Vegetable of Lakhaluni	Lakhaluni	Lakhaluni	*Portulaca oleracea*
7	Pooniben Gamabhai Gamar	Gavra	(i)	Wild mango Chutney	Keri	Keri	*Mangifera indica*
8	Sablalabhai Chamarbhai Gamar	Gavra	(i)	Matar (Pancake of Dhav gum + honey)	Dhav no gunder	Dhav gum	*Anogeissus latifolia*
9	Babiben Devabhai Gamar	Gavra	(i)	Bhakhri (pancake) of Mahuda flowers	Mahuda	Mahuda	*Madhuca indica*

Table 6
List of Plants Used in Recipe Obtained During Shodh Yatra 6.

Route: Mohandari village (Maharashtra state) to Dhulda Village (Gujarat state)
Date: 23-12-2000 to 1-1-2001

No.	Name	Village	*Recipe*	*Name of Ingredients*		
				Local	Common	Scientific
1	Shantiben Bandubhai Padvi	Payarpada	(i) Mokha Bhaji	Mokha	Mokha	*Schrebera swietenioides*
			(ii) Bhaji of soft roots of Vas	Vans	Vans	*Bambusa arundinacium*
			(iii) Bhaji of leaves of Amala	Amala	Ambla	*Emblica officianalis*
2	Yashodaben Shrirambhai Chaudhari	Vakaria	(i) Bhaji of flowers of Kanchan	Kanchan	Kanchanar	*Bauhimia racemosa*
3	Sayaben Ramabhai Thakre	Vakaria	(i) Bhaji of flowers of Champa	Champa	Champo	*Michelia champaca*

The attributes of different grains or other foods which make experimentation with different recipes for processing these foods possible are known to women. But, the germplasm descriptors used in the national and international gene banks around the world do not still include the columns for recording the characterization done by women innovators as well as community members. It is ignored that an increasing share of processed food in consumer baskets would require newer and newer innovations in this sector. The indigenous knowledge of women if catalogued systematically could have expanded the scientific and technological options enormously. This should happen even if gene banks are headed by male scientists, as is the case in most countries including India. Likewise, selection criteria of local germplasm and varieties by male farmer breeders are also not recorded. The biases against people's knowledge are deep and institutional. The women's knowledge tends to get neglected far more than the men's local knowledge.

In a recent study of knowledge systems of old women, who had lived for a hundred or more years in Gujarat, SRISTI has begun documentation of the unique insights such women have gained over the years about environment, biodiversity, nature and life in general. Several lessons have already emerged from this study, perhaps the first of its kind. Nathiben of Mentaal village knew about a particular plant used for animal care. However, she could not recognize it due to her weak eyesight. When about 20 women and men were shown various plants, only one could identify this particular plant for the purpose for which Nathiben had experimented it. This lady had also learnt it from Nathiben years ago when she used to go with her for collecting fodder and cutting grass in the nearby regions.[40] The erosion of this knowledge would have been complete if we had not stumbled upon at least one person who could continue the knowledge chain. It is quite obvious that such knowledge, developed decades ago or sometimes centuries ago and continued by a few women (or for that matter, men), would get lost if it was not documented with due credit to the traditional knowledge holders. In the case of 100 year old women, the risk of such knowledge being lost very soon is very real all over the country and in fact in the world. Local biodiversity, particularly agro biodiversity was monitored annually and managed by local communities through an informal institution. Muleeben described how on the day of Sharad Poornima, a large variety of cultivated and uncultivated vegetables were collected, cooked and offered to God before eating.[41] Such an institution exists in different parts of the country. The one who would have maximum number of vegetables, particularly uncultivated ones, would obviously take a lot of pride and would be talked about in the community. The knowledge of diversity, its uses, institutions for its conservation are aspects of knowledge systems about which women may have unique insights.

There were occasions when certain vegetables were important for social occasions but not liked by the male members of the family. Ganaben and Nathiben explained how they have to cook such vegetables when their husbands were away. The famine and stress foods were extremely important for survival in hard times.[42] Modern science might benefit a great deal from knowledge of such foods which many women who had survived through the famine of 1900 still recalled from their childhood. Which food processing tools should be made from which wood so that the weight was less was also a valuable insight. How much of impact should be made on paddy ears so that while beating the same, only the chaff got separated and the grain did not get damaged was found out in a very interesting manner. Shambuben of Surendranagar district explained, if the beating stick made of 'rayan' wood could be lifted with two little fingers of the left hand, then the weight was considered appropriate. Nathiben asked the researchers to name a grain, which required maximum labour and energy to process after harvest. And when nobody could reply, she mentioned a minor millet called 'bunty' which was the most difficult to process and very nutritive.

There are a large number of other insights emerging from this study being pursued with the help of male researchers. Honey Bee network had failed to scout more than five per cent of women innovators and outstanding traditional knowledge holders out of more than 10,000 innovations and traditional knowledge examples in the database. New methods, perspectives and institutional arrangements have to be evolved to overcome the historical bias.

National Innovation Foundation has instituted special prizes for innovations by and for women. But so far it has not been able to accomplish much in terms of tapping women's creativity in informal science and technology. NIF is determined to overcome this barrier and achieve a balance in our search process. The question would still remain as to whether the scientific establishments can come forward, build bridges and add value to the local knowledge, particularly of women, and thus improve their livelihood prospects, help conserve nature, biodiversity and associated knowledge system with appropriate sharing of benefits. A MOU has been signed between NIF and National Botanical Research Institute, Lucknow, to accomplish this tough task. A similar effort is going on with ICAR and other institutions. Soon a major blemish on Indian science of having neglected local knowledge, especially that of women, might be overcome. How soon it will be, is an open question.

In conclusion, a major question that we need to answer is how to integrate more women in the study and pursuit of science. In other words, can we feminize science? Here are some suggestions that we offer.

POLICY AND INSTITUTIONAL ALTERNATIVES FOR 'FEMINIZING SCIENCE'

So long as tending children remains the mother's responsibility in our society, we have to create space in our institutions for relieving this stress on women professionals through high quality child care system affiliated to each institution. Likewise various facilities, which would make their participation in professional institutions possible, must be provided on a priority basis. However, there are certain specific interventions required for feminizing science:

(a) Flexible timing and part time work have to become the rule rather than the exception for those women scientists, who desire such arrangements.

(b) The use of Information Technology is necessary in networking women scientists, mentoring young scientists to help them cope with multiple roles, providing them high quality peer reference groups and enabling them to work from home wherever feasible.

(c) The fact that science grows through interaction and group work, the collegial culture and social attitudes must change, enabling women to take up complex problems, requiring team work, and experiments at odd hours. Each professional society must be required to report in their annual conference the efforts it has made to involve women scientist in challenging research programs, and not just at membership level but also at leadership level.

(d) The socialization of women scientists will have to be with male senior scientists for sometime due to historical biases. The senior male scientists need to be made sensitive of their responsibility to create a more congenial atmosphere for new entrants as well as for middle rung scientists.

(e) Travelling is an important means through which women scientists can move, learn and build contacts, which become so useful in profession. Special travel grants to women scientists might help in the matter.

(f) It is not just the involvement of women, which is needed for feminizing science; it is the incorporation of feminine qualities in male institutions and mindset, which is necessary. Expression of emotions, seeing inter-connections, use of intuition and not being apologetic about it, and allowing family responsibilities to figure among reasons for changing priorities are some steps.

We do not think that making science more caring, compassionate and concerned with the interests of the under-privileged will require involvement of only women scientists. But we do feel that their involvement might make it more effortless and also more 'natural' to science institutions.

Shodhyatri on the way:
During the eighth shodh yatra at Rajsthan (*Place:* Bhikampura to Nilkanth).

Centenarian woman: 108-year-old Gangaben Ramjibhai Makwana
Village: Samadhiala, *Taluk:* Gadhada, *District:* Bhavnagar

Centenarian woman Gangaben Makwana who was felicitated by Chunibhai Vaidhya during HB network meeting.

Sitaben Lasiyaben Gaikwad: Herbal Medicine Practicioner
Village: Savardakasad *District:* Dang. Sitaben is telling about her biodiversity to the shodhyatri at Savardakasad village during the sixth Shodhyatra.

NOTES

1. R.A. Mashelkar, 'New *Panchsheel* for the new Millennium', Presidential address, Indian Science Congress at Pune, January 3, 2002, New Delhi: CSIR, mimeo. The quotation is from a speech delivered by Krishan Kant in 1999.
2. The educational statistics show that about fifty per cent girls drop out in upper primary.
3. According to UNESCO 1999 statistical yearbook, about 66 per cent women are illiterate, only 38 per cent girls enroll at secondary school level (these figures have been revised to about fifty per cent as per the Selected Educational Statistics, 2000–2001. 36% tertiary students are girls, and about 30 per cent students in Natural sciences including computer science, town planning, communication and transportation are girls. Only 23% of India's Internet users are women.
4. As is apparent from Table 2, hardly 37,363 women worked in research and development institutions as well as industrial units in private as well as public sector in 1998. The enormity of the problem does not need to be further stressed.
5. There were 58. 29 lakh women employed in the organized sector in 1999 out of whom about half were in social and community services and about one fourth in the manufacturing sector (see Table 3).
6. See Lakshmi Lingam, *Sex Detection Tests and Female Foeticide: Discrimination Before Birth*, Thiruvananthapuram: Centre for Development Studies, 1999. Lingam observes,

   > The scanty research evidence points to the extensive use of the test for sex detection purposes, followed by sex selective abortion of female foetuses. Ramanamma and Bambawali's study (1980) of the records of three hospitals in the city of Pune indicates that between June 1976 and June 1977, 700 women sought sex detection in hospital 'B'. Of the 450 women who were informed that they would have a daughter, 430 (95.5 per cent) went in for an abortion. On the other hand, all the 250 women (100 per cent) who were informed that they bore a male foetus carried on with the pregnancy, even though they were warned of a chance of genetic disorder in certain cases. Kulkarni's study of 50 gynaecologists in the city of Bombay reveals that 27 (i.e., 64.3 per cent) carry out amniocentesis tests solely for sex determination. On an average, 42 gynaecologists perform 271 SD tests per month. The remaining doctors (35.7 per cent) reported that only in less than 10 per cent of the cases is the test performed to detect genetic defects.
   >
   > With the mushrooming of clinics conducting this test, it was estimated, in 1986, that there were 248 clinics and laboratories, and approximately 16,000 tests being performed in the Bombay metropolitan region each year. It is estimated that selective abortions must have claimed 78,000 female foetuses between 1983 and 1986.

7. Lalita Subramanyan, *Women Scientists in the Third World: The Indian Experience*, New Delhi: Thousand Oaks, London: Sage Publications, 1998.
8. Dr Manju Sharma recalled the contribution of many outstanding women scientists while delivering the keynote address at the National Consultation on Science and Technology for Women – A Millennium Dialogue, Dec 20, such as Prof. Ashima Chatterjee, Prof. Archana Sharma, Prof. Kasturi Dutta, Dr. Janaki Ammal, Prof. Sipra

Guha Mukherjee, Dr. Sneh Bhargav, Prof. Indira Nath and many others. See *The Hindustan Times*, December 21, 1999.

9. Abha Sur in her article in *The Hindu*, Oct 14, 2001 observes:

Anna Mani came from a large family (she is the seventh of eight children, three girls and five boys) in the former state of Travancore (now part of Kerala) in the southern part of India. Her father was a prosperous civil engineer who owned cardamom estates. Although Mani's family belonged to an ancient Syrian Christian church, her father was an agnostic. By the time she was eight, Mani had read almost all the books in Malayalam at her public library. On her eighth birthday, when she was gifted with diamond earrings, as was the custom in her family, she opted instead for a set of the Encyclopaedia Britannica.

In the matter of education, Mani followed her brothers, who were groomed for high-level careers in government service. While there was no opposition to her desire for higher education in physics from her family, there was little encouragement. In 1940, a year after finishing college, Anna Mani obtained a scholarship to do research in physics at the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore. She was accepted in Raman's laboratory as a graduate student. Mani worked on the spectroscopy of diamonds and rubies. She recorded and analysed fluorescence, absorption and Raman spectra of 32 diamonds. She studied temperature dependence and polarisation effects in these spectra. The experiments were long and painstaking: the crystals were held at liquid air temperatures, and the weak luminescence of some of the diamonds required 15 to 20 hours of exposure time to record the spectrum on photographic plates. Between 1942 and 1945, she published five single-authored papers on the luminescence of diamonds and ruby. In August 1945 she submitted her Ph.D. dissertation to the Madras University and was awarded a government scholarship for an internship in England, where she specialised in meteorological instrumentation.

Mani returned to Independent India in 1948. She joined the Indian Meteorological Department at Pune, where she was in charge of construction of radiation instrumentation. She published a number of papers on subjects ranging from atmospheric ozone to the need for international instrument comparisons and national standardisation of meteorological instrumentation. She retired as the deputy director general of the Indian Meteorological Department in 1976 and subsequently returned to the Raman Research Institute as a visiting professor for three years. She published two books, *The Handbook for Solar Radiation Data for India* (1980) and *Solar Radiation over India* (1981), and worked on a project for harnessing wind energy in India in 1993. Despite her interest in, and involvement with, issues of environment, Anna Mani "got out of the business", as environmentalists ("carpetbaggers" as she called them) seemed to be "always in orbit". She preferred to stay in one place.

10. Abha Sur, ibid.

11. Arati Prabhakar, Director, National Institute of Standards and Technology, USA, was born in New Delhi, India. She received her B.S. in Electrical Engineering from Texas Tech University (1979), and her M.S. in Electrical Engineering (1980) and Ph.D. in Applied Physics (1984) from the California Institute of Technology. She is a member

of Eta Kappa Nu, Tau Beta Pi, and a senior member of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers. She received a fellowship from the Bell Laboratories Graduate Research Program for Women. Dr. Prabhakar was appointed tenth NIST Director by President Clinton, took office May 28, 1993.

Bhama Srinivasan was born in 1935 in Madras, India. She received her B.A. and M.Sc. degrees from the University of Madras and went to England for further graduate study. She received her PhD in 1960 under the direction of J.A. Green at the University of Manchester. She taught in England at the University of Keele, held a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of British Columbia, and also taught at the Ramanujan Institute of Mathematics, University of Madras. She came to the United States in 1970 and taught at Clark University until 1979, and since then has been a professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago. She became a U.S. citizen in 1977. Srinivasan served as President of the Association for Women in Mathematics during 1981–1983. She was a member at the Institute for Advanced Study in 1977 and at the Mathematical Sciences Research Institute in 1990, and has held visiting professorships at the Ecole Normale Superieure in Paris, the University of Essen in the Federal Republic of Germany, Sydney University in Australia, and the Science University of Tokyo in Japan. In January 1979, she presented an AMS Invited Address at the Joint Mathematics Meetings in Biloxi, Mississippi. She served as an editor of the *Proceedings of the AMS* (1983-1987), *Communications in Algebra* (1978-1984), and *Mathematical Surveys and Monographs* (1991-1993), and is a member of the Editorial Boards Committee of the AMS (1991–1994).

Radha Basu joined HP in 1978 as an R&D engineer in HP Laboratories, working in the field of ultrasound imaging, and was promoted to New Enterprise startup manager for imaging in 1981. In 1983, Basu moved to Boeblingen, Germany as European Sales & Marketing Manager of diagnostic medical products. In 1985, she moved to the Intercontinental Group and was responsible for starting up HP's Sales and R&D operations in India, including the India Software Operation, where she served as Managing Director. Basu is on the board of directors of SEEC, Inc., a company that specializes in software products and business solutions for e-legacy to e-business migration. She is a board member of and strategic advisor to Connectinc.com, an Internet e-commerce company for NetMarketmakers. She received the 1995 Woman of Achievement Award for leadership and vision in the corporate field from San Jose Mercury News and Women's Fund. In 1997 she received the Excelsior Leadership Award from Net- IP. She is a co-founder of 'Maitri', a counseling and assistance organization for South Asian women, is an invited lecturer at MIT Sloan school of management, is a speaker at high schools and mentoring workshops, and is on the Board of Trustees of Business and Professional Women. Basu is married with one daughter and her interests include programs for women and children in rural areas, trekking in the Himalayas and classical dancing. Basu is named one of the top 25 women on the web. Jan 31, 2000.

12. It is, of course, true that women scientists do not get their due recognition either in India or outside India. The following facts give us an insight.

Women Scientists elected as Fellows of National Academy of Science:

Indian Academy of Science, Bangalore 28/836 (3.35%)
Indian National Science Academy, Delhi 18/707 (2.55%)
Royal Society, London 70/1200 (5.83%)

13. Dr M.S. Geerwani, former Vice Chancellor, Padmawati Mahila Vishwavidyalaya, Tirupati has been a distinguished scholar in the field of nutrition and home science. In a personal interview fifteen years ago, she told Anil Gupta that her mission was to put the products made of millets and sorghum on the plates of the rich. She believed that the only way the demand for the crops grown by poor dry land farmers could be enhanced was by making them palatable to the rich. She also felt that instead of focusing all attention on wheat and rice, bajra and sorghum should also receive priority because these were also more nutritive in nature. She has been an advisory committee member of SRISTI and research advisory committee of national Innovation Foundation. She has received many awards and honours in her career.
14. Dr Indira Nath, Faculty at AIIMS, New Delhi, has devoted her entire life to finding a cure for leprosy. The citation for loreal award read:

    "Discover and discover again and again..." This one word seems to sum up both Indira Nath's career and her endless battle against leprosy. "What an extraordinary time we are living in! Knowledge of the human gene progresses every day. How lucky we are!" Passion is, without a doubt, the driving force of this internationally renowned Indian researcher. Her vocation appeared early in her life. "I was ten years old when I decided that I wanted to take up medicine. I never doubted that I'd grow up to become a doctor." Unwavering idealism and dedication allowed this dynamic woman to go far beyond her childhood dreams. Doctor and Professor of Immunology at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences in New Delhi, she is considered an authority on leprosy throughout the world.

    Convinced that leprosy could be fought, Indira Nath began her research in the early 70s. At the time, many scientists felt they had discovered a new way of understanding the disease. Along with other Indian researchers, Dr. Nath's groundbreaking studies began by contradicting these new theories and drew a great deal of skepticism. At the forefront of technological progress, Indira Nath created India's first biotechnology department in 1986. She distinguished herself by making an essential discovery: people infected by the leprosy bacilli do not all develop the same disease. Among those who develop lepromatous leprosy, the most serious form, Indira Nath identified a mechanism associated with the triggering of the disease: a deficiency in the immune response system. This discovery is a significant contribution toward the development of treatments and vaccines.
15. Third World Organization For Women in Science (TWOWS), Second General Assembly and International Conference on 'Women, Science and Technology for Sustainable Human Development', Cape town, 8-11 February 1999.
16. See Anil K. Gupta, 'Managing Ecological Diversity, Simultaneity, Complexity and Change: An Ecological Perspective', W.P.No. 825. IIM, Ahmedabad, 1989, p. 115, & 'Third survey on Public Administration: Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi', in V.A. Pai Panandiker (ed.), *A Public Survey of Research in Public Administration, 1980-1990* , New Delhi, 1997, pp. 431–495.

17. Maithreyi Krishnaraj, *Women's Studies in India: Some Perspectives*, Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1986, cited in ibid.
18. SRISTI was set up as a developmental voluntary organization at Ahmedabad in 1993 to support the Honey Bee network. Deprived of sufficient access to natural resources and economic means of livelihood, many disadvantaged communities have no choice but to innovate in order to survive. Many of such creative communities and individuals have only knowledge resources left with them. The emergence of Honey Bee Network in 1989 thus signified a point of departure in our thinking about the way we should deal with people's creativity, knowledge systems and conservation ethic. The growth of the Honey Bee Network required institutional support and it was felt that an independent institutional structure was much needed to sustain Honey Bee newsletter and its associated activities. SRISTI (Society for Research and Initiatives for Sustainable Technological and Institutions) and its research programmes were the result of that realisation. The specific objectives of SRISTI are: (a) to create greater space in society for building upon initiatives and innovations at grassroots level with special focus on women's indigenous knowledge, (b) to document, analyze and disseminate technological as well as institutional innovations developed by people themselves, (c) to validate and add value to local innovations through experiments (on farm and on-station) and laboratory research for generating nature-friendly sustainable technologies, (d) to conserve local biodiversity through *in situ* as well as *ex situ* gene banks managed by local people, (e) to protect intellectual property rights of grassroots innovators and to generate incentive models for recognizing, respecting and rewarding grassroots creativity and associated ethical values and norms, (f) to provide venture support to grassroots innovators to scale up products and services based on grassroots innovations through commercial or non-commercial channels, and (g) to embed the insights learnt from grassroots innovations in formal educational system in order to expand the conceptual and cognitive space available to these innovations.

    SRISTI believes that value addition to indigenous knowledge will help local communities co-exist with biodiversity resources by reducing primary extraction and generating long-term benefits. Further this would facilitate income earning opportunities for people and enhance sustainable resource use. SRISTI actively supports the Honey Bee Network which aims to bring together creative people engaged in the development and application of local ecological, technological and institutional knowledge for sustainable development. The network endeavors to scout, recognize, respect and reward innovative individuals/groups who, through their own efforts, have evolved sustainable solutions for natural resource management. The spirit of sustainability is sought to be achieved by blending the secular and the sacred streams of consciousness around basically seven E's (Ethics, Excellence, Equity, Efficiency, Environment, Empathy and Education). Sristi, 1993, 2001 mimeo.
19. Once when a colleague's wife sent an innovation to the NIF's national contest, Gupta was guilty of asking why did the colleague had sent it in his wife's name. When we met the colleague's wife, he realized that she was, if any thing, even more creative than her husband.

20. Autumn Stanley, *Mothers and Daughters of Invention*, Rutgers University Press, 1995, pp. xx–xxi.
21. Abha Sur observes in her article cited above,

    Raman maintained a strict separation of sexes in his laboratory. The crucial practice of discussion and debate about scientific ideas among peers was denied to women, rendering them peripheral to the scientific enterprise. Casual, informal association with male colleagues was strictly out of bounds. Raman frowned upon any interaction between men and women. Mani recalled how he would mutter "Scandalous!" every time a male and a female student walked together by his window. With a touch of amusement, Mani noted that Raman must have had an uncanny sense, for even while bending over a microscope, he would be able to catch a glimpse of an "offending" couple. She remembered one incident vividly. She was talking to Nagamani, one of her male colleagues in the laboratory. In the middle of a sentence, Nagamani looked up to find Raman at a distance, cycling slowly ("like a big bear") toward them. Nagamani turned pale and fled the scene as fast as he could, she recalled, "leaving me to face the music alone".
22. Maithreyi Krishnaraj, *Women and Science – Selected Essays*, Mumbai: Himalaya Publishing House, 1991; Subrahmanyan, op. cit.
23. Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, *Ecofeminism*, New Jersey: Zed Books, 1993.
24. A.K. Gupta, 'Role of Women in Risk Adjustment in Drought Prone Regions with Special Reference to Credit Problems', IIM Working Paper No. 704, October 1987.
25. For example, Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995; Linda Alcoff, "Justifying Feminist Social Science", *Hypatia* 2 (3), Fall 1987, pp. 1207–27; Sandra Harding, "The Method Question", *Hypatia* 2 (3), pp. 19–35; Lisa Heldke, "John Dewey and Evelyn Fox Keller: A Shared Epistemological Tradition". *Hypatia* 2 (3), pp. 129–40.
26. Lalita Subrahmanyan, *Women Scientists in the Third World*, p. 32.
27. Presidential address given by Dr R.A. Mashelkar, Pune, 2000, CSIR, New Delhi, mimeo.
28. See Table 3 for discipline-wise share of women.
29. Honey Bee network is an informal network of creative artisans, farmers, mechanics etc., and traditional knowledge holders who wish to learn from each other, build upon each other's innovations and combine seven Es, i.e. ethics, equity, excellence, efficiency, environment, education and empathy. Honey Bee network has been scouting odd balls all around the country and also outside it to crosspollinate, ensure that IPRs of the people are safeguarded, and that they get a fair share of any value addition that takes place in their knowledge.
30. Herbal Healer of Savarda Kasad, Ahwa: Sitaben Lasiyabhai Gaikwad: A profile:

    The only woman to practice traditional medicine among the tribals in Savarda Kasad village, Sitaben Lasiyabhai Gaikwad is not another one of those faith healers who commands the awe of tribal people through skullduggery. She is a virtual repository of a wealth of traditional knowledge in indigenous medical practices. Her husband and son are proud of her achievements and consider it their duty to accompany her to all formal meetings.

Native Cure, Natural Cure

Sumanben, a tribal woman of Ahwa taluka, had sustained a major injury as a sharp axe fell on her foot as she was busy cutting wood in the forest. The forest officials took her to the dispensary for emergency trauma treatment. As ill luck would have it, the sutures she had received proved troublesome. The wound would not heal. It did not respond to any modern medication. Sumanben approached Sitaben Gaikwad when she could no longer bear the pain and loss of livelihood due to the wound. The wound was treated with the bark of Mokha (Schrebera swietenioides) and other plants and got completely healed within about 10 days. She profusely thanked god and Sitaben that she was able to get the treatment in Dangs district itself and did not have to go to Surat or Ahmedabad for treatment, burning a big hole in the pocket.

Two incidents that had happened in her life had reinforced the confidence of the Herbal-Healer Lady Sitaben in the efficacy of traditional indigenous medicine and also her will to continue to learn while practicing. About 15 years ago, her husband had a severe stomach ache. Her father and brothers treated him and got him back to normal in a month's time. Again about 10 years ago, her husband fell off a tree and broke his hip. At that time, she herself prepared the correct remedy by collecting plants from the forest and treated him. He recovered quickly.

Down the Generations

The grandfather of Sitaben Gaikwad was a vaid (native doctor) of long standing in Gana village in Ahwa taluka, Dangs district. Her father continued the practice along with his two sons; they helped him in locating and collection of different types of herbs from the thick woods surrounding the village as well as in grinding and preparation of traditional formulations.

Sita was the youngest of five children and the darling of the household. Her two older sisters had already been married away and had set up their own homes when Sita was still a young child. She received only a couple of years' formal education and used to help her brothers and her father in the preparation of medicinal formulations. Her chores included trekking to the forest occasionally to locate useful herbs. Thus, she got an opportunity to learn about traditional medicines from her brothers in early childhood. On occasions when both her brothers were not home, she would dispense medicines.

Young Sita possessed very good observation skills and could easily comprehend the signs and symptoms of various diseases and the effect of different herbs on them. She also had a thorough grounding in the use of different members of the plant kingdom in treating human ailments. She was married off according to tribal tradition to Laisyabhai Gaikwad, a marginal farmer with no formal education, when she turned 16. Laisyabhai lived in Savarda Kasad village, 15 km from Gana in the thickly forested taluka. Her husband and in-laws encouraged her to continue the noble work of treating the sick of the region.

The Present

Three decades later, Sitaben, now 45 years old, happens to be the only woman to practice traditional medicine in Savarda Kasad village and scores of tribals living in several other settlements in the thickly forested area come to her for treatment (this case was compiled with the assistance of Mahesh Parmar, SRISTI field researcher and Jyoti Capoor helped in editing it).

31. Perhaps many first generation women professionals face similar stresses when they have to combine two worlds of work (formal and informal, home and office) and when they have to respond to conflicting standards of performance, 'goodness' and sensitivities.
32. Adapted from Editorial, Honey Bee, 12(4) October-December, 2001.
33. Shodh Yatra (journey for exploration) started five years ago and so far ten such walks have been organized during summer and winter involving about 1950 kilometres through different regions of Gujarat, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Tamilnadu. It helps in recalibrating our understanding of our society and its creative impulses. We honour innovators and outstanding traditional knowledge-experts at their doorstep and share with them what we have learned from elsewhere. In a way, we perform honey bee function of crosspollination as well as learning from local experts and collecting the pollen of knowledge without impoverishing them.
34. See Tables 5 and 6 for a list of regions in which ten shodh yatras have been held, along with season, year, approx kilometres walked in each.
35. Tables 5 and 6 provides some of the recipes collected during one of such Shodh Yatras.

    It may be mentioned here that that Smt Gangaben of Mansa village in Mehsana district of Gujarat had written a book in 1898 containing about 2080 recipes. She had become a widow at the age of 14 and had pooled the best practices so to say, from around the region and put them together in this book. SRISTI is re-publishing this book shortly. It is said that 1000 copies of this book were sold in three days. The point is that learning from people and pooling their best practices is not a new idea started by Honey Bee network and there are pioneers who have tried it before. Also women writers like her have been neglected in literature, and science is deprived because of that.
36. Craig Davis in *Growing Milkweed, a Plant with Prospective Anti-cancer Properties*, Brisbane, Australia: RIRDC, 1993, observes, "Recent research by a small Brisbane-based, Australian-owned company Peplin Biotech Ltd in conjunction with the Queensland Institute of Medical Research has found that extracts from milkweed (Euphorbia peplus) and potentially other Euphorbia species (e.g. E.esula, E.lathyris, E.terracina and E.lagascae) have significant anti-cancer activity in mice and humans. Euphorbia is a large genus of some 2000 species with milky sap, often with poisonous or medicinal uses. It includes beneficial as well as weedy plants, of which some 45 species are found in Australia. Although milkweed and the other promising Euphorbia spp. are new to agriculture, environmental requirements for their cultivation have been established in the course of earlier research by Peplin Biotech and QIMR. The active compounds are unable to be synthesised on a commercial scale and have been patented by Peplin Biotech. An early version of the product has given >90% complete responses on skin cancers in a Phase II clinical trial".
37. Recently in Panchmahals, during the fieldwork being pursued by Kirit Patel, a PhD student at University of Guelph and the seniormost member of Honey Bee network for last twelve years, a question was asked to women and men separately about the criteria of selecting seeds. Not only was the knowledge of women in maize and several minor millets found to be deeper but also they could distinguish various cobs lying

mixed very quickly compared to the men. Personal communication with Kirit Patel, December, 2002.

38. Puri Ben from Gujarat describes various methods of seed storage, for instance adding chilli powder and filtered fine soil. Some women put an earthen burning lamp inside the seed container and then sealed the mouth of the vessel. The lamp will burn till there is no oxygen left in the box and then when the oxygen is exhausted, the lamp is extinguished and the seeds so stored remain safe for several years. There are a large number of such practices developed and used by women all over the developing world.
39. Who in India has not been treated with these remedies which grandmothers use for keeping children safe and healthy, and succeed in doing so in most cases, most of the time? Use of nutmeg paste made with milk for stopping loose motions among children is a well known traditional knowledge of women.
40. See the case study of Nathi Ben published in Honey bee 13(4) 2002, annexure two.
41. Apparently, rituals like these might serve among other purposes, a key purpose of letting communities be aware of the diversity available in the region. After all, a community concerned about its long term survival would keep exploring such issues so as to ensure food security and also nutritional diversity and security.
42. See Nina Etkin (ed.), *Eating on the Wild Side, The Pharmacologic, Ecologic and Social Implications of Using Noncultigens, in Arizona Studies in Human Ecology,* 1994, p. 305; Irene Guijt, Fiona Hinchcliffe and Mary Melnyk, *The Hidden Harvest – the Value of Wild Resources in Agricultural Systems – A Summary,* London: IIED, 1995; Ian Scoones, Mary Melnyk and Jules Pretty (eds.), *The Hidden Harvest – Wild Foods and Agricultural Systems. A Literature Review and Annotated Bibliography.* London: IIED, 1992.

CHAPTER 11

Women and Environment

Jayshree Vencatesan, R.J. Ranjit Daniels and Madhav Gadgil

I

One of the most celebrated stories in Tamil medieval history is of Avaiyar, the Sangam[1] poet. She lived in the court of a tribal king,[2] Atiyaman Anji of Tagadur and sang many verses in his praise. When the king once asked her for the most prized gift, Avaiyar is said to have gifted the lowly 'Amla' (= *Nelli kai* - Tamil, *Phyllanthus emblica*). As the entire gathering stood shocked at this outrage, Avaiyar sang a verse on this fruit, extolling its medicinal and curative properties. It is generally agreed that the period of Sangam marks the last stages of the early tribal cultures in south India and many scholars contend that the compilations of Avaiyar[3] include the contributions of many women who lived during that era.

Women in north coastal Andhra Pradesh, who live in the hamlets close to the mangroves and now form part of the *Vana Samrakshana Samithi*,[4] have traditionally worshipped a female deity that resides within the mangroves. Even today, while constructing their dwellings, the first support that is used is a stem of *Avicennia sp.* The women also use the colour change in *Sesuvium portulacastrum*, locally known as 'Eela koora' (*Eela* = whistle, *koora* = greens) as an indicator of the salinity in the water bodies of the hamlet. They state that once the plant turns deep pink in colour, it is a signal that there is a sea water intrusion. Further east, the Sunderbans are also believed to be protected by a female deity called Bana Bibi.[5]

Although the ecological history of India is replete with a number of such examples, women's role in ecological struggles and debates, and more importantly their critical role in conservation remained 'hidden from history' largely because women themselves remained invisible in the development process.[6] And until 1982, the emphasis of the women's movement itself was on the economic development of women. The emergence of ecofeminism in the early 1970s in many ways was the most vociferous articulation of women's connection with nature. This school of thought, ecofeminism,[7] which shares much of its perspective with the Green Movement, premises that women have a greater appreciation of humanity's relationship to the natural world, its embeddedness and embodiedness, through their own embodiment as female.[8] Ecofeminism as a movement was spearheaded by Ynestra King[9] who sees domination of men over women as a prototype of all other forms of domination.

One of the earliest works in India which connected women and the environment, was of Vandana Shiva[10] who argued that ecological destruction and marginalisation of women have been the results of western science and western economic development paradigms. M. Mies, V.B. Thompson and C. von Werlhof[11] argued that women suffer disproportionately in social and ecological terms, where patterns of exploitation are based on colonialism, racism or worker exploitation. By presenting an alternate view, B. Agarwal[12] states that men's and women's connections with the environment require a critique grounded in the concrete realities of their lives. According to her, ecofeminism by remaining at the symbolic level fails to recognise race, class and ethnic differences. In fact some of the ecofeminists like R. Eckersley[13] reject the 'body-based' arguments for women's superior knowledge of nature on the grounds that men are also embodied and the differences in experiencing this embodiment is a reflection of oppression.

In India, it was only in the eighties that the connection between feminism and ecology was made in a thorough way[14] and this led to a situation where the women's movement took a stand to say 'No' to development, and more specifically critically examine the country's 'food crisis – agricultural policies', which in a sense was a critique of the long-term impacts of the Green Revolution. Shiva[15] states that of the two responses that were available to address the problem of food crisis, the indigenous approach that was devised on the ecological base of agriculture was rejected for the exogenous – that was premised on the conquest of nature. Thus, apart from significantly converting large areas of diversity to mono-cultures, the Green Revolution in its impact on gender division of labour resulted in displacement of male labour, increased the demand for female labour and in certain parts of Tamil Nadu decreased women's role in post-harvest processing.[16] Women were therefore thrown back to their villages, largely to work as labourers thereby setting in feminisation of agriculture. The emergence of ecofeminism and a critical examination of the Green Revolution by feminist scholars was in many ways, simultaneous and complementary to each other. Parallel inputs from other regions, notably Africa and Latin America on the role women play in traditional agricultural systems – ranging from home gardens to cultivation in semi-arid zones, gave a further fillip to this. In India, studies on the role of women in the conservation of agrobiodiversity have been conducted by the Deccan Development Society, Green Foundation, M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation and Navdanya. There have also been individual attempts at studying the relationship between women and natural resources – largely highlighting cases of women farmers in various ecosystems, land alienation and displacement due to developmental initiatives, and the impact of state initiatives such as Joint Forest Management.[17]

Following the Earth Summit at Rio de Janeiro in 1992 and the ratification of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the scope of biodiversity conservation was broadened to include a societal context. Emphasis was laid on the equity provisions of the Convention wherein the role of women in the ecosystem was strongly reiterated. Throughout the world, studies were launched to understand and elucidate the various contributions of women in conservation of natural resources – as custodians of both nature and the knowledge pertaining to the management of natural resources.

In this context, two studies of interest that have been carried out in India include S. Krishna's[18] case study of Arunachal Pradesh and C. Kunwar's[19] study of women of the Himalayas. Krishna's case study is an attempt to explore the gender dimensions in biodiversity management, and thereby suggest concrete steps to recognise and reward womens' contribution. Relying largely on published information and databases of the flora and fauna of Arunachal Pradesh, Krishna effectively highlights the biodiversity richness of the area. The study also provides a similar profile on the tribals and their lifestyles. Krishna reports that Verrier Elwin's observation on the status of the Mishmi women as being 'good' is misplaced, and that tribal systems of Arunachal Pradesh are highly partriarchal. She further states that a study of 17 tribes and sub-tribes all over the state (except Siang) concluded that "many of the rights taken for granted in other communities, tribal ones included, appear to be not for them". In this context it is necessary to understand that in any given society (including some of the remnant early tribal societies) women may appear to have dominance in some aspects or areas, but as J. Atkinson[20] warns, this should not lead us to ignore the significance of sexual stereotypes or to presume that 'women's influence in one context cancels out their degradation in another'.

Krishna presents a forceful argument on the marginalisation of women of Arunachal Pradesh, findings on womens' role and their contribution to biodiversity management in the case study remains largely anecdotal. Summarising the ecological knowledge of the Apatani tribals, she states that (a) older women are able to identify varieties of paddy, (b) men do not have this skill and (c) women seem to have less knowledge on medicinal plants which could also be a case of unwillingness to share information. Krishna also reports that household and community roles among the Arunachali tribes are 'sharply' gendered. While men and boys hunt and fish, food production and preparation are women's responsibility. Although slashing trees for shifting cultivation, construction of dwellings and collecting fuelwood are men's tasks, in recent times women are seen chopping and collecting fuelwood.

The absence of an objective assessment of the socio-ecological system that has contributed to the current scenario in Arunachal Pradesh in the study, not only inhibits the emergence of concrete suggestions for sustaining the ecological knowledge of Arunachali women, but also leaves many questions unanswered. While this does not in any way undermine the immense contribution made by both Krishna and the women of Arunachal Pradesh, it highlights the general inadequacy of systematic research in the area of women and biodiversity.

Kunwar's study that focuses on women as managers of the ecosystem, adopts the cosmo-vision approach in which women view the forest as their maternal homes (*Mayika*) and have a 'deep' relationship. Women of the highlands perceive themselves as central to the existence of the mountains. Kunwar attributes this relationship as the key factor that led to the active participation of women in the Chipko movement. And it is this unique relationship that ensured the continuation of the Chipko movement in various other forms – such as the case of Mahila Mangal Dals in Uttarakhand that have played a remarkable role in conserving the forests, and forest protection movements such as the Maiti Andolan and the Raksha Sutra Andolan.

However, as R. Guha[21] highlights there is a general inadequacy of empirical data on gender and environment in India, despite the presence of an ideological debate over the issue for a considerable period of time. P. Mohai[22] supports Guha by stating that women's concerns of environment have not been systematically studied. This lacuna was also highlighted during the VIII National Conference on Women's Studies that was held at Hyderabad in 1998.

II

NATURE-CULTURE: THE INEXTRICABLE LINK

Western science may have invented the words 'nature', 'biodiversity' and 'sustainability', but it certainly did not initiate the concepts. Indigenous, traditional and local communities have sustainably utilised and conserved a vast diversity of plants, animals and ecosystems since the dawn of *Homo sapiens.* Furthermore, human beings have moulded their environments, unconsciously and deliberately to such an extent that it is often impossible to separate nature from culture.[23]

It is well established that administrative institutions and procedures were part of the social scenario even during the Sangam period.[24] S. Guhan *et al.*,[25] contend that it was during 6th century A.D. that decentralised, relatively autonomous organs of government at the level of the villages were developed. The village comprised ecological and ethnic units, over which there was a single dominant caste or among which there was cooperation in water management. Until the advent of the British, village societies in south India were therefore largely decentralised units, organised at the level of a *nadu.*[26] One of the treatises in the Sangam called the *Tolkappiyam* clearly elucidates this as the *Tinai* System.

The British however maintained that the conditions of the people was very unsatisfactory, and '......a long series of oppressive governments, had reduced the county into such a state that a rich farmer was nowhere to be found. It was also felt that many of the farmers were not serious about paying taxes, and the more opulent amongst them never made an attempt to pay taxes.[27] With such assumptions, the British systematically subverted local institutions and assumed absolute control.

Realising the commercial importance of the forests, especially in regions that were under the rule of Tipu Sultan like Salem which had several economically important plants such as sandalwood, teak, etc., besides several medicinal plants in the hills, the British enacted the Madras Forest Act of 1882.[28] The Colonial government claimed that the forests were destroyed mainly by forest dwellers, and hence it was mandated to protect these common property resources by restricting the existing rights. The need to bring a uniform set of rules for administering forests[29] was also cited to strengthen this point.

Early works of castes and tribes, especially in south India were by the British, and were to a great extent based on assumptions and preconceived notions. For example, hill dwellers with superior agricultural practices like the *Malai alis* were categorised as migrants, and tribes such as the Chenchus were branded dacoits. B. Beck[30] contends that during the Colonial period, Census and District Officers referred back and forth to one other's writings continually and therefore few original observations, notably on the aspect of tribes and their origin were made.

To understand the complex human–nature relationships with a gender perspective, it was felt appropriate to discuss the case study of a landscape in central Tamil Nadu viz. Kolli hills. This landscape is inhabited by a homogeneous tribal community and has been relatively less impacted in comparison with the other hilly areas of Tamil Nadu. The landscape is also of interest since it is located on a plateau surrounded by dense semi-evergreen, deciduous forests. It has only one motorable road to link with other habitations in the plains.

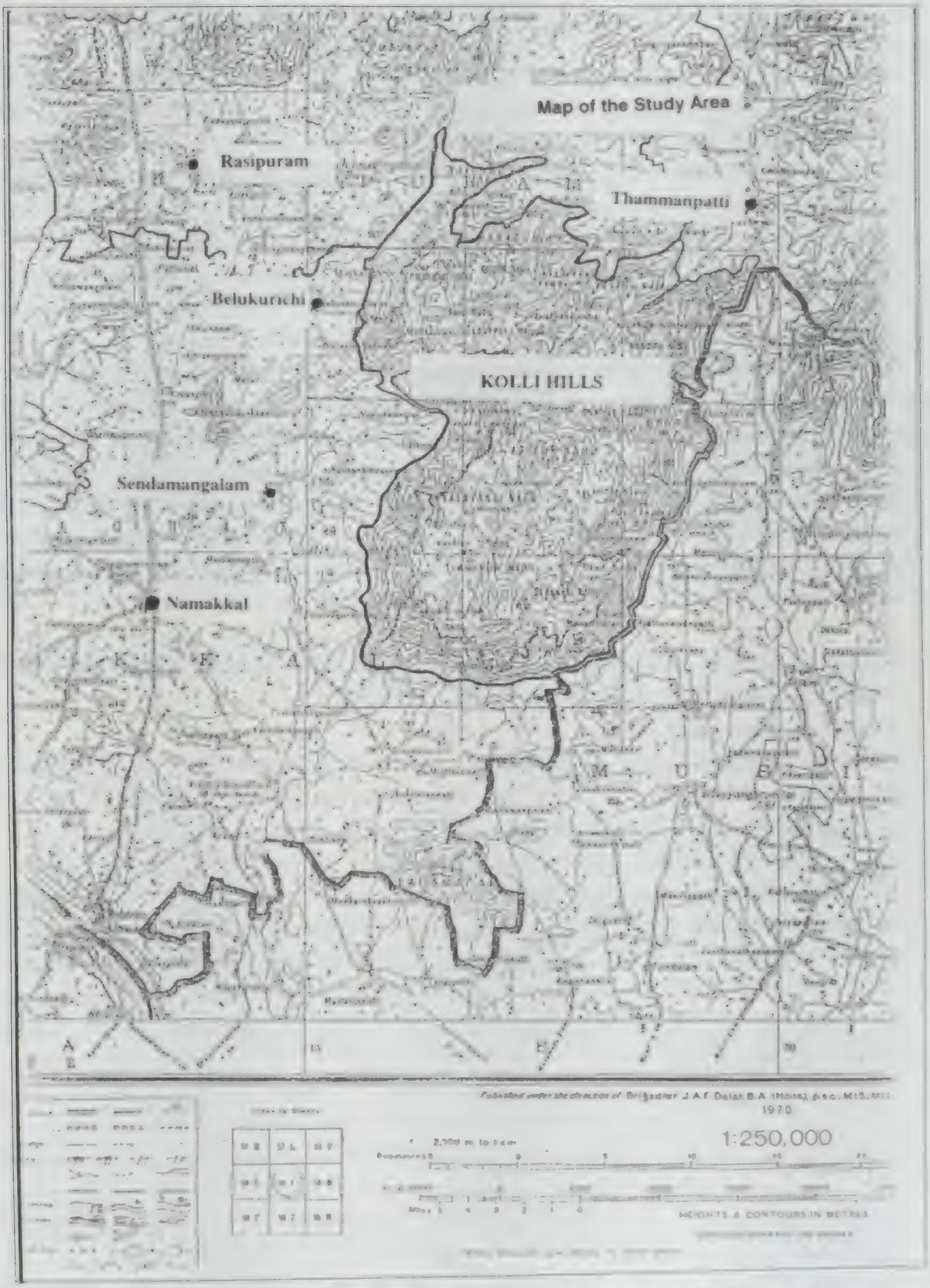
III
THE KOLLI HILLS

The Kolli hills lie between 11° 11' N and 11° 30' N; 78° 16' E and 78° 30' E (see map). The altitude varies from 300–1500 M ASL with the annual rainfall varying between 800 and 1300 mm. The total extent of the landscape is 473.3 sq. km of which 282.93 sq. km is under the jurisdiction of the Block Development Office. The rest of the area is steep and rocky, with the bases being covered with dense deciduous forests. The forest, above 1000 m ASL, resemble the high elevation and montane forests of the Western Ghats. R.J.R. Daniels and J. Vencatesan[31] postulate that judging by the structural resemblance of the high elevation forests and the floral and faunal affinity, Kolli hills can be considered a biogeographical relic. The floristic survey of Kolli hills by Ranjita Kani[32] enumerates 916 taxa, of which 854 are angiosperms, 57 pteridophytes and 5 gymnosperms. About 115 species of birds,[33] 27 mammals excluding bats and 5 species of amphibians,[34] and 37 species of reptiles[35] have been reported from the hills.

The Kolli hills also share a number of endemic species with the more humid Western Ghats. These include *Crotalaria longipes* (plant), *Phlautus sp. Rana temporalis* (amphibians), *Psittacula columboides* and *Myiophonus horfieldii* (birds). Early missionaries to the hills such as Jesimen Brand have recorded the presence of a large number of sloth bears and hornbills on the hills.

THE KOLLI HILLS AND ITS INHABITANTS

Kolli hills comprise 14 revenue villages locally known as *nadus*. Each *nadu* in turn consists of small habitations or hamlets and there are in all 273 such habitations. Administratively, the nadus fall within the jurisdiction of Rasipuram and Nammakkal taluks of the Rajaji-Nammakkal district of Tamil Nadu. The hills are largely inhabited by one group of tribals called the *Malai alis* (*Malai* = hill, *alis* = dwellers) who are numerically the second most dominant tribal group in Tamil Nadu. Although the *Malai alis* are spread over the northern hill ranges of Tamil Nadu and are generally known by the hill range they inhabit, it has been established that the Kolli *Malai alis* are a distinct group with a combined ancestry of *Vedars*, *Malavars* and *Vellalars* that seems to have amalgamated during the reign of Cheras in the 3rd century A.D. The Kolli *Malai alis* have a great repute as hunters,[36] cow doctors,[37] and agriculturists.


Map of the Study Area
Rasipuram
Thammanpatti
Belukurichi
KOLLI HILLS
Sendamangalam
Namakkal
1970
1:250,000

The map shows the location of Kolli Hills in the state of Tamil Nadu. The landscape has been divided into nadus (revenue villages) and Reserved Forest Areas. The nadus are limited to the elevated plateau region and are surrounded on all sides as well as along the hill slopes by dense forests. The case study covered the entire area shown in the map.

It is commonly believed that Kolli hills for centuries, has been guarded and protected by a maiden – the *Kolli Paavai* which when literally translated means 'the maiden who kills'.[38] The early missionaries to the hills referred to the place as 'Mountains of Death'. *Kolli Paavai* is believed to have been created by the celestial beings and sages who came to the hills for their penance. The sages believed that the hills, with its dense forests, springs and medicinal plants was an ideal abode for penance. The Sangam literature alludes to the *Kolli Paavai* as a maiden created and placed on the western slopes of the hills. She is believed to have had an attractive, mist-draped appearance. The *Kolli Paavai* is believed to have lured and killed people who sought to destroy the hills – and it is this fear that kept intruders away from the hills for a number of years. The *Kolli Paavai* has since been given the form of a deity and housed in a grove.

Judging by the overall description in the numerous verses of the Sangam literature, it may even seem that *Kolli Paavai* was symbolic of the rock bee (*Apis dorsata*) which exist in large overhanging hives in a grove. There is also the possibility that the *Paavai* was symbolic of the 'black-water fever' – the dreaded endemic malaria of the hills. It was believed that any agony or harm caused to *Paavai* will incur the wrath of the honey bees which would swarm and attack the intruders. The following verse from the Sangam: in *Nattrinai*[39] is a fine example wherein the wrath of *Kolli Paavai* is best described and compared with that of the rock bee[40]

I suffer countless torments.....
She is like the painting done by gods
That resists the ravage of time
In the western slope of the Kolli hills
Made famous by the rule
Of Porayan the great river of largess
From whom the bards obtain
Fleet-footed horses with graceful laces
Which cut a smooth path through
The rocky slopes with their curved hoofs.....

She is like the painting on the slopes
Where the restless bees
Feast on the pollen in the Kanthal flower
That blooms in clusters large
The flower that is seen between wide leaves
The bees then build their hives
Many in number and rich with honey
With eyes like dusky patches
She is, my friend, like the lovely painting
On the slope that oozes with honey
But she is out with intent to kill
And I am her doubtless victim.....

However, her primary role as the guardian of the hills was effectively submerged in literature as well as historical and anthropological studies. Instead, the *Paavai's* qualities of being a woman who enticed men to slay or destroy found repeated mention in the Tamil literature – ranging from the much acclaimed Silapaddikaram[41] to recent short-stories and novels. In Silapaddikaram for instance, in chapter 6:60-61, where the folk fare at the sea front is being described, it is mentioned that one of the folk artistes looked 'as if she had taken the aggressive form of the *Kolli paavai*'.

The Kolli hills also has a number of other female deities who are supposed to guard smaller groves, or preside over agricultural operations. For example, the deities *Nachi* and *Pidari* are believed to ensure good health and optimal harvests, respectively. To ensure continued protection from these goddesses, special days in the year are celebrated. For instance, every year in the tamil month of Chittirai (April-May), to appease Pidari, women of the village dressed white, carry offerings comprising ragi (*Eleusine coracana)* ear-heads and paddy to the grove. These are presented to the deity by the priest, after which the women cook a gruel of these grains and distribute it across the village. Interestingly, most sacred groves in Kolli hills are the abodes of female deities. For example, one of the fourteen nadus in Kolli hills, viz., Valavanthi nadu which is spread over (1693 ha) has eight sacred groves of which five are dedicated to the following female deities: *Nachiamman, Kongalamman, Vadakaalman, Sedaganachi and Periapidari.*

SYSTEMS OF COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES IN THE KOLLI HILLS

In Kolli hills, the traditional system of governance, which is through a body called the *Oor Panchayat* (the *oorgounder, poosari* and a few important men, who are nominated by the *oor gounder* constitute the body of governance) prohibits the participation of women in public spheres. Membership to this body is hereditary and firmly excludes women.[42] Apart from prohibiting the holding of office by a woman, participation of women during the course of settling disputes is also not allowed, unless the issue of contention is a marital dispute. The *Oor Panchayat* since ancient times has been solely responsible for determining issues related to natural resources. Apart from partitioning land for growing various crops, and for pasture, leasing rights between the households within and across the *nadus* was also decided by this body. Even now for example, in the case of Ariyur Solakkadu or Ellakiraipatty which are adjacent villages in the hills having about 10 ha of wetlands, there is considerable demand for obtaining leases from the nearby villages of Thindupatti and Kilsolakkadu. While the individuals interested in granting such leases are identified by the interested parties, it is the *oorgounder* who arbitrates. Similar procedures are followed for agreeing on water-use, bunding, etc.

A recent issue of conflict in Kolli hills is the granting of 'rights of access' by way of leasing common and private lands to bauxite mining by the panchayat. The older women of the hills state that the mines have not only led to erosion and the destruction of a sacred grove located within the area that was being mined but also impacted the social aspects of their lives considerably. In traditional societies, patches of land or water were dedicated to some deity and kept free of exploitation. These sacred groves, ponds or pools therefore effectively served as refugia for species of prey, or extensive human use. The effectiveness of this system is vouched by the fact that new species of plants that have disappeared from everywhere else, are being discovered from these sacred groves, as for instance the woody climber *Kunstleria keralensis.*[43]

Despite their protests over the loss of the sacred grove, the women have not been effective in their protest since they do not hold any legal rights or positions of authority. Interestingly however the women continue to revere the sacred grove that was destroyed in 1994 and are categorical in stating that the mines have to be closed. The *Malai ali* men claim to hold a more 'practical' view of the issue and state that the destruction of one grove does not imply the total loss of their revered lands. Reverence for sacred groves or totemic species is perceptibly higher in the *Malai ali* women than in the men. This is evident in the number of parables that the women use, which are largely built around the central theme of the unique natural features of the hills. A classic example of this is the parable on the fish species. The Kolli hills have a major water body which falls from a height of 200 ft called the Akasa gangai or Aruvi. The strong current of breeze in this region disperses the water cascade to give an illusion of massive movement, which the *Malai alis* consider divine. This water body harbours a number of fish species, which the *Malai alis* contend are endowed with supreme powers. The *Malai ali* women have a number of compositions on the supernatural powers of fish. Their reverence is further emphasised by the fact that fish is not included in the natural diets of the *Malai alis.*

Sacred groves in Kolli hills are known as '*sami solai*' – and these are presided over by numerous forms of Vishnu or Murukan, the predominant gods of hills in the ancient Tamilagam. In certain instances, a supernatural guardian or an insect or liana is believed to guard the grove. One such patch of forest in the Kolli hills is the *Madikettansolai* – which literally means a forest where one loses his mind. It is strongly believed by the *Malai alis* that an unidentified plant present in this forest, when physically contacted by human beings leads them astray.

The *Malai ali* women are prohibited from entering most of the sacred groves in Kolli hills. This deterrence is justified by a number of reasons, chief of which is the fear of the 'unknown'. In certain groves where the entry of women is allowed, a stringent dress code is practised. Interestingly however, the *Malai alis* believe that women cannot be abused in such groves where their entry is allowed and in some villages, women use such groves as an abode of refuge in times of distress.

IV

ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES AND RIGHTS OF THE *MALAI ALI* WOMEN

The productive role of the woman, especially in subsistence farming systems has been for ensuring household food and nutrition security. To understand this contribution of the *Malai ali* women and further extend the scope of this role as a means to explore the relationship of the *Malai ali* women to their immediate environment, a number of interviews, focus group discussions and simulation exercises were held with the *Malai ali* men and women over a three year period (1995–1999). Results thus obtained have been consolidated in the following section.

In Table 1, a comparison of the daily workload of the women and men in Kolli hills, has been presented in the same manner as obtained following a focus group discussion held with 153 men and women from five villages.

Table 1
Comparison of the Daily Workload of the Women and Men in Kolli Hills

Women	Men
1. Making the beverage – kanji/tea or coffee	1. Cleaning the stys, cowsheds tec
2. Washing vessels	2. Feeding the animals
3. Cooking	3. Taking the animals for grazing
4. Cleaning the house and the vicinity	4. Hoeing
5. Curing the front yard with cow-dung and water	5. Clearing scrubs through slash and burn for cultivation
6. Fetching water	6. Chopping wood for fuel
7. Dressing up the children	7. Butchering and cleaning meat for domestic consumption
8. Washing clothes	8. Ploughing
9. Taking care of guests	9. Sowing
10. Carrying food to the fields	10. Bunding
11. Taking the agricultural produce to the shandies	11. Irrigating
12. Feeding the cows, goats, pigs and chicken	12. Manuring
13. Collecting dung	13. Applying fertilisers
14. Collecting fodder	14. Fencing
15. Collecting green leafy vegetables and spices	15. Plucking fruits
16. Weeding	16. Collecting forest produce – honey, tamarind, siyakkai etc
17. Tilling	17. Marketing in shandies, dealing with traders
18. Ploughing	18. Loading into lorries
19. Hoeing	19. Going to banks
20. Levelling and breaking of clods	20. Going to the LAMP or Block Development Office
21. Sowing	21. Settling disputes through the Panchayat
22. Transplanting	22. Taking care of temples
23. Harvesting and winnowing	23. Hunting

Table 1 *Contd*

Table 1 *Contd.*

24. Selecting earheads of grain that are to be used as seeds
25. Storing seeds through drying
26. Maintaining the thombai (granary)
27. Clearing the Kollakadu (rocky terrain)
28. Pounding paddy
29. Grinding ariyam/ragi
30. Dehulling samai and tenai
31. Grinding rice flour
32. Pounding chillies and other spices
33. Fetching water
34. Boiling water
35. Collecting and chopping wood for fuel (approximately 300 headloads/year)
36. Cleaning and grinding jackfruit seed into flour
37. Buying and selling or bartering goods
38. Aiding in construction work
39. Maintaining plants for flowers
40. Stringing flowers
41. Going to the ration shop

The *Malai ali* women on an average work for 14 hours/day, and find it rather difficult to understand the term 'leisure' and 'rest'. The activities of the *Malai ali* women can be summarised as under.

The activities of *Malai alis* can be broadly categorised into three categories viz. mutual, exclusive to men and exclusive to women.

- Women undertake a range of agricultural activities (11–30 in the table), which require specialised skills, are arduous but do not involve any transaction of money. The men's activities, on the other hand, clearly indicate decision-making authority and control of monies. It is also interesting to note that the *Malai ali* women also undertake activities such as ploughing, which elsewhere in the state of Tamil Nadu are strictly a male task. The mutual tasks are largely confined to agriculture although activities like weeding are predominantly carried out by women. Similarly, men are more involved in slash and burn operations.
- Activities under the domestic sphere are largely confined to women and in view of the prevailing facilities, rather arduous.
- Activities that are exclusive to men are largely confined to: (a) *sholas* and deciduous forests; for example, hunting, collecting honey, fetching wood for fencing or fuel;

Table 2
Workload across a Calendar Year as Detailed by the *Malai alis*

Tamil Month	Equivalent English Month	Workload
Chittirai	April - May	High
Vaigasi	May - June	High
Ani	June - July	High
Adi	July - August	High
Avani	August - September	Moderate
Puratassi	September - October	Low
Ippasi	October - November	Low
Karthikai	November - December	Moderate
Marghazi	December - January	High
Thai	January - February	High
Masi	February - March	Moderate
Panguni	March - April	High

(b) public sphere and governance; for example, interaction with banking and other institutions, settling disputes, etc.; and (c) trade related activities.

- Women undertake activities which are largely confined to cultivable lands and common lands. In addition, their activities are also largely focused on food crops (whether cultivated or gathered). The contribution of the *Malai ali* women to conservation of crop diversity is reflected by the fact that selection and storage of seeds, and maintenance of granaries is exclusive to them. Except for legumes which are coated with red mud and dried, all other seeds are sun-dried and preserved in air tight containers. Supporting the contribution of women to conservation of crop diversity are the post-harvest activities. In many instances, activities like cleaning, winnowing are preceded by or concurrent to the selection of seed material.
- Approximately 37 tools and implements are used by the *Malai ali* women in their agricultural operations. These range from the common basket to specialised grain-specific sieves and sickles. The men use about 15 different tools and implements, and these are largely sickles, long handled-knives, spears and bows and arrows, which are used for hunting. Some of the men also own country made guns.
- A number of plants whose flowers are used for wearing are maintained by women in the immediate vicinity of their homes. The most preferred are hibiscus, jasmine and crossandra. These flowers are used for all auspicious events, while the flowers of *Plumeria* are used only in burials.
- Unlike most other regions of India, the concept of a kitchen or home garden is non-existent in Kolli hills, primarily because the *Malai alis* view Nature in a more holistic manner. When a *Malai ali* woman refers to her home, it could mean an area ranging from the mere confines of her house to the entire hamlet or sometimes, even the adjacent *shola* forest. This is more clearly understood when their practices of childbirth are considered. The *Malai alis* have a separate hut in the midst of the agricultural fields that is used for childbirth and postnatal care. The woman comes back into the village after spending about 41 days in the hut, while continuing to carry out most of her tasks in the field.

Table 2 enumerates the list of activities as detailed by the *Malai alis*. Evidently, not all these activities are undertaken on a daily basis. To ascertain the workload across a calendar year and define periods of workload, 86 women from 6 villages/hamlets were involved in discussion. The results are summarised in Table 2. It is evident from the table that the workload is coincident with the agricultural calendar, with April-August being the peak period of work for the women. This period is coincident with food crops in the agricultural calendar of Kolli hills. From the month of August, harvesting of the major commercial crop, viz., pineapple begins in Kolli hills, and this is the time that men are actively involved in the operations.

V

KNOWLEDGE BASES AND THEIR RELEVANCE

Studies on indigenous communities in Latin America highlight the existence of gender-based traditional knowledge systems that entitle men and women to distinct knowledge legacies. This system allows women and men to function in the effective management of their rainforests and also empowers each gender to act as an active and conscious agent in biodiversity conservation. The use of the term 'traditional' implies the repetition, from generation to generation, of a fixed body of data, or the gradual, unsystematic accumulation of new data. This body of knowledge manifests itself in a number of forms – parables, proverbs, verses, songs, folklore, all of that is extremely adaptive. Since this knowledge largely relies on observations and direct experiences, in many instances, all that is considered irrelevant or redundant gives way to new thoughts or observations. Traditional knowledge also gives ample margin for generalisations and error, largely because the mode of transmission of this knowledge requires continuity and use.

The merit of incorporating traditional knowledge for management of biodiversity is well recognised. The study of gender-based knowledge systems is however fraught with methodological constraints. In systems that rely largely on oral traditions, articulation of knowledge is not consistent and uniform. It also demands that methodologies and tools that are adopted simulate the form in which the knowledge exists. For instance, in a community that has a rich tradition of folklore, the methods adopted to understand the knowledge should ideally be based on the structure and form of the local folklore tradition.

In instances where the knowledge system of women is assimilated through observation and experience, articulation of the same in 'constructed situations ' becomes difficult. Further, even in tribal communities, gendered-knowledge is further influenced by other social variables such as age, birth-order, position within the household or community. During the course of the field studies, it was evident that older women were more articulate. Younger women were often not available for interviews or discussions because of their work. In fact, some of the young women felt that the investigators could ask the men whatever information was needed since 'the men were most happy talking to people as they had all the time in the world to while away'.

Using methods that largely relied on observation and recalling in familiar scenarios, an attempt to understand the gendered knowledge of the Kolli *Malai alis* was made. One such method involved assessing the number of plants and animals that the *Malai ali* women and men could identify or recognise in four different habitats in a given span of time. Checklists thus generated by the men and women were discussed for authenticity and error in a group discussion and a consolidated table of the total number of plants/animals recorded was compiled. Tables 3 and 4 summarise the results.

Table 3
Number of Plants Identified by *Malai Ali* Men and Women

Habitat	Total number of plants identified		Number of plants exclusively identified		Number of plants identified by men and women
	Men	Women	Men	Women	
Shola (Forest)	29	18	24	13	5
Vayal (Wetlands)	19	14	15	10	4
Metukadu (Uplands)	14	13	12	11	2
Savukku thotam (erstwhile pasture lands currently under silver oak plantation)	17	12	12	7	5

Table 4
Number of Animals Identified by *Malai ali* Men and Women

Habitat	Total number of animals identified		Number of animals exclusively identified		Number of animals identified by men and women
	Men	Women	Men	Women	
Shola (Forest)	13	13	7	7	6
Vayal (Wetland)	4	8	3	7	1
Metukadu (Uplands)	8	5	8	5	0
Savukku thotam (erstwhile pasture lands currently under silver oak plantation)	7	5	7	5	0

The overall pattern indicates a perceptible difference in the total number of plants recorded than in the animals. On examining the lists the following were discerned:

- There appeared to be a gender specific search image. For example, women observed and listed medicinal and food plants as against men who also recorded tree species that are used in fabricating instruments, hunting devices, etc. This may be a reflection of their divergent roles in the community.
- In many cases, as was later found, men and women used different names for the same species of plant. While men largely used morphological features to name the plant, women based their description on attributes such as cooking quality and resemblance to food commodities. For example, one variety of the well known Foxtail millet (*Setaria italica*) was described by the women as *'Pal tenai'* which in Tamil translates as 'milk millet'. This variety of millet tends to appear like milk when it is being cooked. The men on the other hand referred to the same variety as '*Ven tenai'* which literally means 'white millet'.
- Whereas men listed organisms that are typical to the respective habitats, women included all organisms that they observed which included even eagles and vultures that flew overhead. Such a difference may be attributed to the fact that men spend a lot of time hunting animals whereas women's knowledge of animals is to a large extent derived from what they have heard from the older generation. In many instances, it was also observed that the *Malai ali* men described their hunts with a fair amount of unrealistic episodes and organisms especially when the listeners were predominantly women.
- There was also a perceptible difference in the relative ease with which men and women worked in certain habitats. For while men were more accustomed to walking through the *sholas,* women were more comfortable in the rice fields (*vayal*), which is a reflection of the varying roles of the *Malai ali* men and women.

The process of assessing gendered knowledge across different age groups was attempted through visual tests. It is however to be noted that while the levels of knowledge could possibly vary across the different types of organisms, it is not easy to assess such knowledge unless considerable number of years are spent in the field with the people. For instance, regular sessions spread over eight months were required to obtain a consolidated list of the broad categorisation of flora as trees, plants, shrubs, grasses etc, that is used by the *Malai alis*. The list thus obtained records, 68 trees, 52 plants, 22 climbers and 16 grasses as being typical of Kolli hills.

Birds have played a very important role in the culture of many tropical forest dwelling communities especially the Fore tribes of New Guinea Highlands.[44] In view of the fact that birds are relatively easy to identify and recall due to their distinct colour, habits and call, birds were used as test-organisms for the visual tests. Based on the checklist for birds of Kolli hills,[45] 40 common birds of the region were selected. Visual images of these birds, which were drawn to comparative scale, were presented to three groups (30 respondents/group) representing the age categories of middle age, young and adolescence. The respondents were requested to identify each bird and its habitat, and enumerate the use value and their responses were compiled (see Table 5).

Table 5

Identification of the common birds by women and men across three age groups: + indicates 'known', X indicates 'unknown', – indicates 'no response' and ? is 'doubtful identification'

S.N.	Common Name of the Bird	Youth		Adolescents		Middle-aged	
		M	F	M	F	M	F
1	Pond heron	+	+	+	+	+	+
2	Grey partridge	+	+	+	+	+	+
3	Nightjar	+	X	X	X	+	-
4	Pied kingfisher	X	X	+	X	+	-
5	Grey junglefowl	+	+	+	+	+	+
6	Whitebreasted waterhen	+	+	+	+	+	+
7	Whitebreasted kingfisher	+	+	-	-	+	-
8	Small green barbet	+	+	+	+	+	+
9	Redwattled lapwing	+	+	+	X	+	-
10	Bluewinged parakeet	+	+	+	-	+	+
11	Spotted dove	+	+	-	-	+	+
12	Small green bee-eater	+	-	-	-	+	-
13	Blossomheaded parakeet	+	+	+	+	+	+
14	Goldenbacked woodpecker	+	+	+	+	+	+
15	Hawk cuckoo	X	X	X	X	X	X
16	Koel (female)	+	+	+	+	+	+
17	Hoopoe	+	+	X	X	+	-
18	Coucal	+	+	+	+	+	+
19	Pitta	+	+	X	+	+	+
20	Barn swallow	+	-	+	-	+	-
21	Golden oriole	+	+	+	+	+	+
22	Greybacked shrike	+	-	+	-	+	-
23	Ashy swallow shrike	+	-	X	X	+	-
24	Black drongo	+	+	+	+	+	+
25	Racket tailed drongo	+	?	?	-	+	-
26	Jungle myna	+	+	+	+	X	X
27	Common myna	+	+	-	-	+	+
28	Treepie	+	-	X	X	+	-
29	Paradise flycatcher	+	+	+	-	+	
30	Redwhiskered bulbul	+	+	+	+	+	+
31	Scarlet minivet	+	+	+	+	+	+
32	Yellowbrowed bulbul	+	+	+	+	+	+
33	Nilgiri flowerpecker	+	+	+	-	+	+
34	Jungle babbler	+	+	+	+	+	+
35	Whitebacked munia	+	-	+	-	X	X
36	Maroon breasted sunbird	+	+	+	+	+	+
37	Jungle crow	+	+	+	+	+	+
38	House crow	+	+	+	+	+	+
39	Whistling thrush	+				+	
40	Magpie robin	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Correct identification	37	28	28	20	30	23

From the above table it is evident that in addition to age, the different roles of men and women in a *Malai ali* society influence the ability to identify birds. For instance:

- Across different age groups, the youth (male) and the middle-aged (male) scored higher than the adolescents (male and female) and women in the categories of youth and middle-aged. The *Malai alis* attribute this decline to the formal education system and state that in schools children are 'taught to learn blindfolded'.
- In the case of men, wrong identification was because of confusion with similar looking birds (for example, magpie robin and large pied wagtail) while the women had higher instances of 'no response' due to not knowing/sighting the bird. The women were also hesitant to 'guess' – possibly since they feared ridicule or humiliation.
- Birds that were correctly identified by women were predominantly those which are considered edible/medicinal. Although not recorded, each such identification would be followed by a discussion on the possible dishes that could be made of the meat of these birds.
- Habitats, especially of shola birds were identified more accurately by the men, who identified birds based on the calls and flight whereas women relied on colour and plumage to identify birds. Women also tended to use generic names like ***kuruvi*** (bird) or ***kili*** (parakeet).
- Although not quantifiable, it was evident that men could identify the birds more quickly in comparison with women, whose responses were invariably preceded by a discussion amongst themselves, which may be a reflection of diffidence.
- Use value of birds, for the Kolli *Malai alis* is restricted to food and medicine. Of the 40 species, 27 were listed as food, 2 (Blossomheaded parakeet and Bluewinged parakeet) as medicine. Of the birds that are listed as 'not eaten', except for the pond heron which is considered to have hard meat, the other birds require trapping skills and thereby are hard to hunt.

VI
CONCLUSION

Kolli hills, until 1970s selectively assimilated external influences in all sectors. The most dominant of these influences was the introduction of certain crops such as coffee, citrus fruits, etc. However, by 1963 Kolli hills was declared a tribal development block and in 1976-77 it became part of the Integrated Tribal Development Programme that over the years has led to a condition that is locally described as mixed.

Literacy rates grew rapidly, (36.88% in 1998) and primary health care – largely immunisation against infectious diseases was made available. Malaria was controlled using large scale spraying of DDT. Organised trade of agricultural produce began through local markets/shandies. Concurrently, forest cover decreased rapidly (from 70.29% in 1930 to 43.36% in 1970 and 46.15% in 1998[46]). Contiguous forests have given way to fragmented forests and this has been typical of the plateau rather than the slopes. Simultaneously, area under crops increased dramatically over the period of two decades beginning with the seventies. In 1970–1971, the total cropped area was 3227.41 ha which by 1994–1995 increased to 13224.00 ha; and much of this area (52%) is under cash crop cultivation.

Women who had until the advent of cash crops been part of the agricultural system, today find themselves removed from it – their skills of selecting or storing seeds is redundant, decisions about the crops are made by external commission agents. Younger girls prefer working as *anganwadi* teachers or nurses since they feel that it gives them a sense of distinct identity. Some of the older women categorically stated that increased dependence on the market to ensure household food security was a direct outcome of cash crop cultivation. They also stated that until a couple of decades ago, it was possible to cook a meal for the family with the grains, meat, vegetables and spices that could be collected in their fields.

Interestingly though, traditional systems that prevent women from taking active part in administrative institutions continue to hold good. Findings from other regions of India, viz., Orissa and the Himalayas support this trend. P.R. Ehrlich *et al.*,[47] report that in these regions where women traditionally spent almost twice as much time in agricultural operations as do men, the role and thus often the status of women are fast diminishing due to increased production of major staple grains. This factory-style farming, has demeaned the status of women as ' vessels of traditional agricultural knowledge'.

As Kolli hills and its inhabitants rapidly change, the *Malai ali* women continue to remain invisible and unheard, as indeed is the case of women in numerous other tribal and rural societies in India. This article focuses on only a segment of the millions of invisible and unheard women – the women of the Kolli hills, a region which has hardly caught the spotlight in the mainstream story of the Indian nation. We would like to conclude by recognising the fact that over the past decade, feminist scholars have been attempting successfully to make unheard voices heard and invisible people visible. It is also appropriate to acknowledge the support that has been forthcoming from other scholars and activists, both men and women, who are sensitive, and opposed to the continuing patriarchal system.

NOTES

1. It is said that old Tamil poets sang about traditions, already ancient in a mythical literary convocation, called Sangam, at Madurai – the capital city of one of the major dynasties viz. Pandyas, and it is after this convocation, the first historic period of Tamil Society – 300 B.C. to 300 A.D. was defined and named Sangam. D. Ludden, *Peasant History in South India.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985, p. 480.
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SECTION FOUR

WORK

CHAPTER 12

Gendering Agrarian Issues: The Uttar Pradesh Experience*

Smita Tewari Jassal

I
INTRODUCTION

As livelihood security of marginalized groups comes increasingly under threat, particularly in the context of economic liberalization, issues of land rights assume criticality in the countryside. In this essay I argue for a gendered understanding of land issues, since with the growth of new export-oriented and private agricultural industries seeking to establish control over agricultural lands, the poorer sections – and among them women in particular – are losing control over basic resources. Further, with the emphasis on land rights being granted to single holders, there is a steady erosion of the layering of rights over the same piece of land, which, in the past, ensured the legitimacy of informal access to use by multiple users and multiple claimants. In this context, land rights for women has come to encompass a whole gamut of strategies for securing rural women's livelihoods, rather than simply establishing legal title over land. As women do not constitute a homogeneous category but are located within distinct class and caste hierarchies, the essay will also seek to establish the links between women's shrinking resource base and their corresponding stakes in the struggle for equitable distribution of productive resources.

The arguments presented in this essay are drawn from a variety of sources ranging from fieldwork involving in-depth interviews and participant observation, to village surveys and workshop participation. The core of the evidence pertains to on-going fieldwork in villages of Badlapur block in the eastern UP district of Jaunpur, combined with preliminary village survey material and intermittent short field visits to villages of Manikpur block during January-March 1998. The fieldwork evidence pertains to villages Barsara and Dehiyan in Jaunpur, and villages Rukmakhurd, Hela and Harijanpur in Banda district of the Bundelkhand region. Between 1997 and 2000, I was a regular participant at grass-roots workshops organized by the 'UP Abhiyan Samiti for Land Reforms and Labour Rights', a loose coalition of approximately 30 NGOs working on agrarian issues in several districts of UP, which came into existence in 1997. The discussions generated at these village and district-level meetings, where participants ranged from activists, administrators, academics, legal experts, small and marginal farmers, tenants and agricultural labourers, sharpened the research questions raised in this essay.

The discussions were also crucial in evolving a set of criteria for isolating the most appropriate villages illustrative of the nature and processes of agrarian change in the eastern U.P. countryside. Three of the six workshops I attended on 'Women and Land Rights' organized by the Abhiyan Samiti, proved to be invaluable for the themes explored in this essay. These were held in Naugarh, Chandauli block, Varanasi district from 13 to 15th October 1999; at Manikpur in Banda, between 13 and 15th November and at village Khutahan, Badlapur block, Jaunpur from 6th to 8th January 2000. In addition to my own notes of the above proceedings, I also draw on the Report of the six workshops prepared by Bharati.[1]

The exercise undertaken here is of particular significance in view of the state's abdication of its responsibility to engage with land questions in the context of increasing globalization. Other well-known arguments for the state's abandonment of the land reform agenda, such as the unavailability of land for redistribution, also need to be addressed. As the state relegates these issues to the backburner, they are increasingly being taken up by people's movements. How successfully land rights can remain a people's issue characterized by struggles from below, with potential for collective action in the countryside, is a question that needs examination.

With the state abandoning its commitment to land reform and planners arguing that gains in the area have already been achieved, two interesting sociological phenomena are simultaneously observable in UP. First, the arena is being opened up for people's movements and struggles. Second, far from being a male-centred concern, land reform has gradually emerged as a central issue for women's rights. In several pockets throughout the state, land reform is being reexamined and reopened afresh by women's groups or *jan sangathans* working in the area of women's rights. Recent studies over the past twenty years, as well as the experience of rural women's organizations have shown that women are increasingly demanding a share in land and other assets, and arguing for recognition as economic actors and decision-makers with regard to their survival options.

II

THE RURAL CONTEXT: STRUCTURES OF PATRIARCHY

With the UP Zamindari Abolition Act of 1951, absentee and large-scale landownership was sought to be abolished in the state. In eastern UP, however, owing to their political clout, many landlords continued to hold on to large parts of their lands by registering them in the names of kin, and getting them cultivated by hired labour and through 'concealed' tenancy arrangements. The upper layers of their former tenants emerged as minor peasant proprietors, forming a class of surplus-producing peasants with the capacity to invest in agrarian production. The emergence of a strong and resourceful 'middle peasantry' since the 1950s in UP has been well documented.[2] Owing to inter-generational partition of lands, many of the large holdings have reduced in size, each landlord owning on an average 5 acres of land, worked both with family and hired labour. The financial stability of this class of former large landholders has enabled investments in threshers and tube-wells and in renting tractors, which also accounts for their greater prosperity in the countryside.

During the 1950s and 60s, while land reform was the cornerstone of the state's government policies, its confinement within male-centred development paradigms rendered the land reform exercise incomplete. It is now well known that where the slogan 'land to the tiller' was interpreted literally to mean the peasant who ploughs the land, the tiller as the beneficiary or recipient of land was invariably seen as male, a bias which continues to persist. Hence when *pattas* or title deeds were being issued during the process of land redistribution, women as recipients of title deeds were left out of the picture. That this bias continues today is underscored by findings from the field of development studies relating to displacement and rehabilitation policies governing the Tehri dam oustees. For instance, in cases where the woman was the *khāta* holder (holder of the title), entitled to a plot of land together with her husband, the compensation sum was given to the husband.[3] E.G. Thukral concludes that in the absence of affirmative clauses pertaining to women, they are automatically left out.[4]

The assumption about males being the tillers and hence the direct agricultural producers, which thereby makes them the sole beneficiaries of land reforms, has eclipsed the fact that not merely individual women but entire families and rural communities are dependent for survival on ways in which women are able to access resources, including land. The lowest rungs of the agrarian hierarchy – the landless agricultural labourers were the supposed beneficiaries of the state's land redistribution programmes. If we focus on the women of the class of agricultural labourers, our category would include those who are free to sell their labour as well as those who are unfree or bonded, together with women marginal holders who take up seasonal wage work. As direct agricultural producers, women of these categories are dependent on some form of agricultural activity for their own survival as well as that of their families. The labour of these women, whether in the field or in gathering forest produce, or subsistence-level cultivation, is the essential ingredient for survival. Occupying the space on the lowest rungs of agrarian hierarchies, these women are also the most marginalized by virtue of being women.

Eighty per cent of the population of UP lives in 1.12 lakh villages. Eighty-five per cent of the work force in the state is dependent on agriculture. From the land which was obtained after the implementation of the land ceiling legislation, it was possible to redistribute only seventy to seventy-two per cent. This amounts to a mere 50 lakh acres of redistributed land which constitutes only 1.4 per cent of the entire agricultural land. According to the 1987–88 figures, among rural households, sixty three per cent are self-employed in agriculture; 14.46 are agricultural labourers who possess a mere three per cent of the agricultural land.[5]

While men seek employment in industry and services, women continue to remain dependent on agriculture. The percentage of women classified as agricultural labourers in 1991 was double the figure for men, hence nearly half the women workers are agricultural labourers compared to only a quarter of male workers.[6] Owing to widowhood, desertion and male migration, over 25% of rural households are now de facto female-headed. Despite this, the focus of both governmental and non-governmental organizations has been on employment-generation for women rather than on ownership and control over land or other productive resources.

Eighty-nine per cent of UP's agricultural land still remains in the hands of large landowners. The figures reveal that labour and landlessness are inter-related, which strengthens the case for land reforms. An alarming fact is that marginal farmers are often not equipped adequately with tools and agricultural implements, which compels them to sub-let their meagre holdings under unremunerative tenancy terms and conditions and to seek wage labour. The high incidence of concealed tenancy in UP has been a cause for some concern in recent years, both to the state administration and to NGOs working on agrarian issues at the grass-roots.[7]

In eastern UP, certain contrasts with regard to landownership patterns were found, which are reflected in the choice of our two fieldwork districts, Banda and Jaunpur. In the villages of Banda district, landownership continues to persist in the hands of the Thakur and Brahmin large landholders, who were able to retain control over their holdings by registering their lands in the names of various family members. The landlords lease out lands on oral leases and also rely on agricultural labour provided by Kol tribals and the scheduled caste Chamars. Banda, where semi-feudal structures are still in place, thus differs from the tenurial conditions prevalent in Jaunpur, where medium-sized holdings predominate as a consequence of zamindari abolition. Here the gainers were former sharecroppers and tenants belonging to the middle caste of Yadavs, who obtained much of the ownership and control over the land, emerging as the most numerous among small landholders.

Women among the middle level cultivating castes are skilful and industrious agriculturists and their contributions have, in no small measure, contributed to the recent prosperity of castes such as the Yadavs, Kurmis and Koeris. Chamars, who occupy the bottom rungs of caste and class hierarchies, continue to remain landless. The former landlords of Jaunpur district, predominantly Thakurs or Rajputs, unlike the large landholders of Banda, are today petty commodity producers, relying largely on family supervision and agricultural labour. The stony terrain and single-crop agriculture of Banda presents another important contrast to the agricultural productivity and relative prosperity of Jaunpur district, despite the small landholdings.

In Jaunpur, the increasing mechanization of farm activities, including the replacement of labour-intensive irrigation with motor-driven tube-wells, tractors for ploughing and electrical threshers for harvesting, has meant a decline in landlord dependence on hired labour, substituted now largely by family labour.[8] This fact, combined with the small size of holdings in Jaunpur, is also a factor leading to the redundancy of permanent hired labour. The consequent decline of the agrarian labour market has spelt closure of a significant avenue of wage earnings for both men and women within the village economy but its impact is particularly devastating for women of landless families who are unable to travel outside the village to seek wages in brick kilns etc. As holdings are sufficiently small after intergenerational partitions, *bataidari* (tenancy) is also not very widespread in Jaunpur, unlike the large landholdings of Banda, which necessitate large-scale leasing out to tenants under a variety of verbal *bataidari* arrangements. Subsequent sections will explore the implications of these structural differences between the fieldwork areas for women's land rights.

The legal framework has spelt further disadvantages for women. For the purposes of this paper, only a few significant issues are highlighted. As the Hindu Succession Act does not recognize women as coparceners, daughters are severely disadvantaged, enjoying only the right to the male coparcener's share of the joint property, unlike the sons, who by virtue of being males, enjoy an indefeasible right in such property. Consequently, daughters and widows lose their rights in case the male coparcener renounces his share or wills it away. The most detrimental clause rules that unlike sons, married daughters have no residence rights in the ancestral home. While unmarried, divorced and widowed daughters do have rights of residence, they cannot demand a partition of the dwelling, unlike sons.

Daughters' rights while curtailed and minimal, remain altogether unavailable to women in agriculture as the Hindu Women's Right to Property Act of 1937, and subsequently the Hindu Succession Act of 1956, did not apply to agricultural land. Further, the provision that for modification of laws, the President's consent is needed, while protecting women against state-level attempts to exclude daughters from inheriting agricultural land (as happened in Punjab in 1969), remains ineffective against future discriminatory legislation relating to tenancy rights, ceilings etc.

The section of the Act pertaining to tenancy rights concerns us here, as tenancy holdings are exempted from the purview of the Hindu Succession Act of 1956. This means that in land actually held under concealed tenancy or oral leases, the Hindu Succession Act does not apply, and consequently, for all practical purposes, where such tenancy is widespread, as in Banda, women have almost no rights of inheritance to agricultural land. Under the law, the widow inherits the tenancy only in the absence of male agnatic heirs of the deceased coparcener, daughters and sisters being lowest in the gradation of heirs. Moreover, the woman may hold only a limited or life-interest, the holding embodying a tenancy right devolving to the heirs of the last male landowner. It must be remembered that as tenancy is supposed to be abolished in UP, this clause could be applicable in the rarest of cases. For all practical purposes, the concealed nature of the tenancy and the verbal lease arrangements, actually ensure that leases are renewed after every two years, which makes the inheritance of tenancy rights almost impossible.

Jan sangathans and non-governmental organizations working for the implementation of land reforms have, along with the issue of land redistribution, placed the issue of minimum wage and gender parity in rural wage structures at the centre of their demands. Theoretically, the distinction between agricultural labourer and landless peasant remains an important one for strategies seeking to mobilize both groups to elicit their involvement in common struggles. As the history and experience of agrarian struggles in the country have shown, landless peasants are those, who at one time may have had land and been involved in cultivation, but who now find themselves without land. Inevitably, this category is likely to prioritize obtaining land. Very likely, members of this group possess a sound knowledge base and factors of production required for effective agriculture. Not surprisingly, they would also seek to lease in land for cultivation rather than seek wage work in other districts involving travel over large distances, unlike the category of agricultural labour. While for the latter, the wage issue holds mobilizational appeal, the landless peasant could be effectively mobilized through a struggle for land.

Addressing the concerns of both these categories has led to the combined thrust of organizations like the 'Uttar Pradesh Abhiyan Samiti for Land Reforms and Labour Rights'. This loose coalition of approximately 30 local *jan sangathans* scattered over Uttar Pradesh, came under a common umbrella in 1997, to work towards building pressure for the completion of land reforms and to struggle for wage issues. Their demands, being sufficiently broad-based, encompass the interests of agricultural labourers, marginal peasants and the landless. The levels of politicization among these categories present a varied and complex picture, largely determined by intra-class divisions of gender and caste. If these three categories are further differentiated by gender, the issues to be discussed below become clearer, as they affect men and women differently. Consequently, gendered responses to the issues would require to be taken into account if the struggle for land reform is to yield any meaningful results. In subsequent sections, some of the problems resulting from ungendered approaches to land reforms and the ensuing biases which have conditioned their implementation, are taken up for review.

III

SOURCES OF GENDER DISCRIMINATION

The Household as Male Centred

An erroneous assumption which has undermined women's access to land and other productive resources for over nearly 40 years, is the perception of the household as an undifferentiated unit within which members share resources equitably, enjoy equal access to them and subscribe to common ideology and interests. This bias which sees the male as the household head, and presumes equitable sharing of resources among members, has ignored the evidence of persistent gender inequalities in nutritional allocations, basic necessities, healthcare, education, access to property, earnings, resources and, most importantly, the division of labour within households. The implications of these assumptions for women are being dealt with at length in development studies today.[9] With illustrative evidence from the field, we argue that over time this assumption has been singularly detrimental for women's access to land and productive resources, including access to loans for productive purposes as well as house-sites etc.

At a workshop held in Naugarh, Chandauli, near Varanasi, in 1997, women agricultural labourers' lack of autonomy within households was reflected in innumerable accounts of their reluctance to help themselves to the household's common pool of cash reserves even in the case of medical emergencies involving children, if the household head, usually male, was absent. One woman recounted her experience of mortgaging a piece of jewellery at the local *bania's* to raise money for the doctor, in preference to spending the Rs. 100 note for which the husband's permission had not been obtained earlier. A recurring theme at the three rural women's workshops held in UP cited in this essay, was women's experience of enslavement arising from feelings of being empty-handed and lack of control over earnings and the inability to spend for essential needs without male permission. Dependence on men, i.e. fathers, brothers, husbands and sons was uniformly cited as evidence of lack of control where resistance to male authority could mean being turned out of homes. The sense of insecurity which in turn promotes subservience, was also cited as a barrier towards demanding their rights.[10]

Many women agreed that lending grain to neighbours from the household's grain reserves had to be done surreptitiously and involved risk as it incurred the wrath of husbands or other male household heads. The plethora of such accounts and the near uniformity of similar experiences of rural women, testifies to the unequal sharing of resources within households and the extreme powerlessness of women despite their considerable economic contributions and labour for the well-being of households.

In contrast, men saw as legitimate their claims to women's jewellery for raising sums from moneylenders, ranging from Rs. 500 and above, on grounds that the loan would be advantageous for the entire household. There was unanimous agreement among women in all the workshops attended, about the fact that men were able to exercise rights over women's jewellery, or at least persuade them to part with such valuables to tide over difficult times. This often resulted in the women having to relinquish their claims to the item altogether, when the sums along with interest required to retrieve the mortgaged item became prohibitive.[11] After a lapse of the stipulated time on the mortgage, women were likely to find themselves depleted of wealth, often without alternative possibilities to compensate for the loss. Apart from pawning household utensils against small loans, it was women's wealth which formed the preferred items for mortgages. These revelations are significant pointers to the extent of inequality of resource access within households.

The bias is starkly revealed even in the ways in which males establish their control over agricultural technologies, the government extension schemes and sources of information. Unless specified under the scheme, women were found to be marginalized in the access to new and innovative technologies. Female seclusion practices, illiteracy and lack of access to public spaces and markets, lack of mobility etc. are usually cited as factors inhibiting women's access.[12] The lack of technical and managerial skills and inability to mobilize funds for new forms of production and marketing further aggravate the marginalization of rural women.

Credit for Women

As women are not seen as the primary producers within households, their ability to obtain credit for productive purposes, even for the purchase of milch animals, seeds, farm machinery and pump-sets etc. is severely hampered. Such biases are so deep-rooted that women-headed households, single women farmers and widows are then forced to rely on male members to negotiate with the bureaucracies of credit-giving institutions and banks. Where corruption and bribery for oiling the state machinery is rampant, the delays and harassment that women face by virtue of their gender can only be imagined. A recurring refrain in many of the fieldwork villages as well as the workshops, was the helplessness of widows in attempting to claim their pitiful quotas of state pensions for dependent widows.

The alarming incidence of landlessness among widows is indicative of structures where land is inherited by the sons of the deceased male in equal shares. In the division of property, widows are quickly eased out of their shares, find themselves discarded, rendered irrelevant and in a relationship of dependence on one or the other of their sons. This phenomenon has been observed across class lines as even women from well-off families find themselves on the brink of destitution and acute poverty when widowed or deserted. Instead of strengthening widows' rights over property and land, and ensuring their easy access to productive resources, widow pension schemes only serve to make a mockery of women's rights and seek to transfer to the state, the patriarchal household's own responsibilities towards one of its former productive members.[13]

Hence the failure of the state and societal discourse to perceive women as productive members at par with males and as equal partners in the productive enterprise of the farming household, severely handicaps women throughout life and particularly in widowhood. This final and most vulnerable stage in rural women's lives is also the one where the ideology of gender inequality within households demonstrates its worst and most alarming consequences, rendering women as non-persons and worthless, a state tragically reinforced by the prevailing caste and ideological structures. Hence far from challenging the age-old ideological structures of oppression, the overriding adherence to gender disparities within households actually reinforces and accepts as given a whole gamut of societal handicaps faced by women.

Within a context in which endowing daughters with land would amount to a threat to the patrilineage, the idea of daughters being given land rights in their natal homes has been looked at with extreme disfavour. As a result, a host of arguments against its feasibility are offered, mainly that supervision of cultivation would be difficult for women married into far-away villages. Social pressures for daughters to voluntarily relinquish their claims to agricultural lands even where they are granted by law, operate within a state milieu which does not provide adequate support for women to pursue such claims. It was observed in UP, that government and state functionaries are the most likely to obstruct the implementation of legal justice in favour of women in property-related cases. Women, who have these rights on paper, are discouraged from pursuing them and emerge isolated when faced with many-pronged attacks, ranging from physical violence to being drawn into endless legal battles against patrikin. The obstruction of the recording of women's shares in government land redistribution schemes occurs within the prevailing and socially accepted bias of gender inequality within households.

Gender Discrimination in Wages

Social science has long acknowledged a neglect in research on the heterogeneity of labour in south Asia and the conditions which affect female labour force participation.[14] It is also acknowledged that the differential patterns of male and female employment and earnings in agriculture and the cultural norms which impede women's occupational and farm mobility, in turn has profound implications for the efficiency of production.[15]

In 1996, a study of the estimated all-India agricultural average daily real wage rates for agricultural workers in 16 states showed that female workers' wages continue to be lower than male workers' wages. There are also substantial cross-state differences in the wage rates of female agricultural wage workers, ranging from as low as Rs. 1.72

in Tamil Nadu to Rs. 4.77 in Punjab. Surprisingly, some of the regions with relatively high levels of yield and agricultural development are also characterized by a combination of low female agricultural labourers' wages and higher male–female wage differentials than are the poorer states with low agricultural productivity. Figures show that on an average, female agricultural workers earn only 64% of male workers' wages in Tamil Nadu, 67% in Maharashtra, 75% in Harayana and 78% in Punjab while in the relatively poorer states of Bihar, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh, female agricultural workers' wage earnings are 85%–87% of male workers' wages.[16] However, as the reasons for the figures remain under-investigated, broad trends point to a significant rise in female agricultural workers' real wages as a consequence of growth in agricultural output, although there are sizeable disparities across states. The evidence from UP appears to support trends in other states where the effect of the supply factor, the crowding of female wage workers in agriculture, was to reduce their real wage rates.[17]

While in some cases farm technology may have reduced the demand for female labour, our evidence appears to support conclusions of other scholars that 'improvements in agricultural performance in itself are not likely to bring about equity in wage earnings, nor will such improvements alone raise the female workers' wages proportionate to those of the male workers'.[18] Further, growth in agriculture has not automatically brought about either equity or gender justice. Singh cites evidence from findings of agricultural economists which suggest that differentials in wages are influenced more by social institutions, customs and also the nature of contractual relationships between employers and farm workers than by the market forces of supply and demand.[19]

The differentiation of tasks by gender has been aptly described by Rogaly as 'actually a set of practical activities which operationalize gender ideologies', in the sense that they reflect local ideas about appropriate and approved roles for men and women.[20] Fieldwork also suggests that women's unequal status within households is further reinforced by persistent wage disparities between women and men for the same agricultural operations. In areas where opportunities for labour are shrinking, such as in many parts of Jaunpur, the state's male-centred development ideology, recognizing males as unitary heads and decision-makers, actually legitimizes and reinforces lower wages for women. Against this background, even the state's assertion of equal wages for both genders, appears weak and unconvincing and is unlikely to be operational. Throughout the state, struggles for the enforcement of gender parity in wages are underway, and are usually combined with struggles for ensuring the stipulated minimum wages.

More intensive fieldwork would be required to establish conclusive linkages between women's powerlessness within households and the wage structures operating in the region. In other words, a question that needs investigation is the extent to which women's inequitable access to resources within households is modified by gender differentials in wages as well as in the duration of wage employment. As a Chamar labourer of Barsara village in Jaunpur explained,

> In 365 days we get work for maybe 4 months, for the rest of the 8 months we live a life of (*zillat*) hardship. Sometimes we go hungry. Here the poor get Rs. 25 as wages. In that, tell me how are we to feed, clothe and educate our

> children. The situation with the work is that in the neighbouring village, the Yadavs cultivate potatoes. They have managed with tractors. In potato cultivation we used to get 3 types of wages – *buuai, gudai* and *merhi charhai* (sowing, hoeing and building small water channels for irrigation). All the three have now disappeared. In *dhan* and wheat cultivation tractors are used. For *katai* (harvesting) harvesting machines have come into use. This wage has also gone, so how are we to sustain our livelihoods now?

Gender differentials in wages are an accepted feature of rural UP and the variations in ratios could be as numerous as the number of villages in each district. Owing to the absence of uniformity in wages, employers are relatively free to evolve their own ratios within certain broad parameters, the prevailing labour market and availability of labour in the region, pitching the terms of the labour contract usually in favour of the employer. An accepted rule of thumb is that the employer fixes the wages for women at least 20 per cent below that of men. Fieldwork revealed that on an average where men receive Rs. 50 for a day's work, women get little more than Rs. 30 for the same kind of work. The variety of wage arrangements and the disadvantages they spell for women, relative to men for the same type and amount of work, all over eastern UP is startling to say the least.

In many pockets of eastern UP, the presence and availability of migrant labour, largely from the neighbouring state of Bihar, keeps labour wages down. In border districts, migrant labour was employed in peak seasons, displacing much of the local labour and even forcing local agricultural labourers to accept reduced wages in subsequent seasons. Where wage labour was organized, we saw evidence of resistance to enforce reduced wages and boycotting of landholders' calls in seasons when migrant labour is unavailable.

In recent years all over Jaunpur, landless labourers have resisted low wages for ploughing and irrigation tasks and the 'beck and call' arrangements which had traditionally existed between upper caste landlords and their lower-caste landless labourers, a fact which is endorsed by the findings of Srivastava and Lerche.[21] Srivastava cites the complaints voiced by Jaunpur landlords that labourers having become assertive, vocal and demanding, refuse to start work before 8 am and attempt to compress all the work within a six-hour period. During fieldwork, a Mallah landless labourer on the lower rungs of the class hierarchy and among the Most Backward (MBC) of the Other Backward Classes (OBC) of Jaunpur's Barsara village gave the following reason for preferring wage work in the neighbouring village,

> If we work for the landlords in the village, they may come to call us as early as 6 am. Now I have my tea and report for work in the neighbouring village by 8 am.

The brunt of labourers' resistance is invariably borne by the women of the labouring households who stay back in the village and who, owing to various compulsions, and the advantages of working near home, are unable to be as assertive as their men. In this sense our findings support Lerche's contention that the cost of men's struggle for emancipation was women's unfreedom.[22] Indeed in the Jaunpur villages, despite occasional threats from landlords, of being debarred from using landlords' fields for collection of fodder and for easing themselves and, under severe provocation, prohibition on using the landlords' pathways, women found themselves unable to give up working for village landlords altogether. Barsara Mallah women for instance, relied on the goodwill of village landlords to obtain at cheap rates, the *sarpat* grass for rope-making, which constitutes an important source of alternate livelihood security for this caste. As *sarpat* grows in abundance on lands bordering the Gomti river, in possession of Brahmin landlords, Mallah women cannot afford to incur the displeasure of the landlords by boycotting work, even when wages are abysmally low.

It seems clear that the division of labour within the labouring household is gendered as it is the women who are prepared to weed landlords' fields or carry out other tasks in slack seasons, sometimes without any direct payment, leaving the men free to migrate to neighbouring villages and towns in search of more remunerative employment. Maintenance of goodwill relations with landlords by the labouring women ensures employment in the peak seasons for both men and women of the labouring household, besides access to fodder for cattle, grass and credit in times of need.[23]

Such evidence from Jaunpur flies in the face of accepted wisdom on peasant resistance, particularly the well-known James Scott thesis which argues that as men are more exposed to employer control under prevailing technologies, or deeply entrenched in patron–client relationships where more traditional social structures persist, male resistance is unlikely to be open or collective in nature.[24] Hence social factors are seen as hampering the formation of male collective and concerted class-based opposition, leaving men with sporadic and individual methods of resistance. Extending Scott's thesis to Malaysia, Hart has argued for a greater capacity among women for collective organized action, allowing them to openly challenge the interests of large landowners. Hart argues that women's exclusion from political processes is a major factor in promoting their resistance and in facilitating women's collective action.[25] However, Hart also acknowledges that the same processes of exclusion that give space to women's resistance also undermine their capacity to respond to larger changes in production relations by rendering them increasingly marginal in the processes of production when agriculture is modernized.[26] These connections into ways in which power and gender ideology influence changes in rural labour arrangements and the complex and contradictory effects of ideological constructions of female 'inferiority' and 'dependence' and male superiority and responsibility, need to be established through more extensive analysis of data from the field. As pointed out above, the role of Jaunpur labouring women in facilitating their men's resistance has been noted by other scholars as well.

Since the 1990s, with the Mayawati led BSP government, workers and labourers in Jaunpur have become increasingly politicized, registering major gains. In Barsara, its declaration as an Ambedkar village was cited as another reason for the assertiveness of the Chamar agricultural labourers. In addition, the support to people's struggles offered by *jan sangathans*, has been a factor in the sustaining wage struggles over a period of time.

In Jaunpur's Dehiyan village, a Brahmin landlord's attempt to molest a woman labourer of the Chamar caste was met with severe outrage and concerted resistance with the support of a local NGO, the Bharatiya Jan Sewa Ashram in 1997. The Chamars moved the courts, the Brahmin landlord remained in the police lockup for some days and the entire Chamrauti (Chamar *basti*) of the village has since boycotted work in Brahmin landlords' fields, forcing them to hire labourers from neighbouring villages at higher wages. Thus a struggle which started out to restore the Chamars' *izzat* (dignity), ended up as a powerful movement for Dalit and labouring class solidarity against age-old upper caste oppressions, including low wage rates and *begari* (forced labour). The rise in wages was so immediate that villagers relate this development to the Brahmin boycott, succinctly articulated thus:

> Formerly for *junnhri ki pitai*, (threshing corn) they used to give us 2, 3 or even 1 *panseri* but now we get 8 kgs. for a whole days' work.

This particular struggle, being the first such attempt by the BJSA to organize and support Dalits, established the credibility of this NGO among the Dalits of the region. As a result of the public outcry, the empowering message for agricultural labourers as a whole, that went out in surrounding villages of the Badlapur *tehsil* was that Chamars being united, are capable of standing up for their rights.

On the other hand, about the same time in Jaunpur's Gosainpur village, the lack of organization and disunity of the Chamars was in evidence when a Chamar labourer picked up a fight with his upper caste employer over non-payment of wages. When the situation came to blows, the Chamar wanted to file a court case against his oppressor. The case was not registered and despite an enquiry based on his complaint, he was pressurized by his own caste members to reach an agreement with his employer, which provoked the following comment from one informant:

> Someone has obviously been bribed. Villagers are scared of 'big' people. When it is a question of *izzat-aabru* they do not speak up, but put a lock on their mouths. They are scared that because of negative publicity our sisters and daughters will not get married.

In prosperous pockets of Jaunpur, resistance by local labour has however yielded results, making labour costs prohibitive for small landholders who consequently tend to deploy family labour or alternatively, have their holdings cultivated on crop-sharing basis. In many pockets it was observed that marginal farmers, wage labourers and *bataidars* of small holdings are in fact mutually interchangeable categories. Sensitivity to the implications of these complexities for women in the agrarian structures being studied, and the relative advantages or disadvantages that accrue, are issues which require exploration on a case by case basis.

The variability of wages, if seen against the variable purchasing power in the region due to price-rise, may mean greater disparities. Brass cites the example of the decline in the purchasing power of agricultural labourers' wages, after the Green Revolution, suggesting that lower real earnings usually necessitate higher borrowings. Brass concludes,

> While the amount of debt may itself diminish, therefore, the capacity to repay this may decline even more, a situation which in real terms licenses not a decrease but an increase in indebtedness.[27]

The linkage between wages and credit has been well established in the literature. As an explanation for the incidence of lower wages it is argued that where the landlord is also the creditor, the borrower will usually agree to work at a rate far below the prevailing wage rate.[28] Alternatively, some adjustment would be made with the labourer's wages, but most likely he would be expected to work for the creditors on a priority basis for which wages may be paid in full or as a fraction. Fieldwork revealed the existence of 'tied labour through lease' arrangements wherein employers leased out small pieces of land on a fifty-fifty crop-sharing basis, as a privilege to meet the consumption needs of labourers during lean seasons. Depending on the verbal terms set by the employer, the labourer, in return for this 'privilege' agrees to plough the lender's land either free or for a nominal wage. The most likely way in which these loans are adjusted is by enlisting the labour of the women and children of the labouring household. Other unpaid small services which could be enlisted by landlords in such arrangements include assistance in thatching roofs, cleaning cattle sheds, occasional domestic work, chopping wood etc. In cases where high interests are charged on the loan, labourers may end up entering into semi-permanent relationships of *begari* (debt bondage) with their creditor landlords. What is important is the capacity of the borrower to repay debts, but very often the reason for women discharging such obligations was to secure consumption loans for the future.[29] How this plays out in the wage differentials for women needs to be examined.

We found for instance, that in the Banda villages, women are still paid in kind where the men get cash. Women receive a wage amounting to a grain measure of *panchpanw* (11/2 kg) while the men may receive anything between Rs. 20 and 30, well below the minimum wage. In parts of Jaunpur where wages were in kind, they amounted to 3 kg wheat or 5 kg rice for *katai* (harvesting). In many areas, 2 1/2 *seer* wheat was the wage fixed for women. This may be compared with another eastern U.P. district, Deoria, where the minimum wage was found to be one *bigha* of cultivable land for use during the year by the labourer. At rice threshing in Deoria, women's wages were Rs. 10 for 10 hours of work. For harvesting wheat and rice, the wage was 1 *bojha* (bundle) for a day's work. In the *rabi* season this work lasts for a month. In potato cultivation, wages vary from 21/2 to 3 kg for women to 5 kg for men.[30] It appears that even in areas where men's wage agreements include meals, employers do not give women mid-day meals. The argument offered is that women bring their own packed lunches, that they observe commensal taboos and are unlikely to eat with other caste members, that they prefer to go home and cook their own meals, that they work only half a day and that men's work being much harder, men deserve a meal. All of these arguments are contentious and serve to conceal a discriminatory wage policy which receives legitimacy from a state uncommitted to enforcing the minimum wage. Either way it is a rare employer who provides meals for women and not a single such incident came to light during the course of fieldwork.

Another archaic wage arrangement which seems to persist to this day in lieu of a minimum wage, is the custom of *lehana*, whereby the labourer is allowed to take home from the field, the amount of harvested grain he/she is able to lift up with both hands. An able-bodied wage labourer may be able to carry off between 10 and 20 kg or one headload of grain, for which working hours could be up to 18 a day. In Jaunpur villages which border Azamgarh, a woman labourer is allowed to take away the 11th load of grain after the harvest. Wages also vary in kind depending on the nature of the work ranging from weeding, sowing etc., the regional variations being considerable (ibid). It is easy to imagine the inherent inequality of such arrangements, which reinforce stereotypes about the efficiency of the larger and more able-bodied of the human species. In neglecting to enforce the minimum wage irrespective of gender, the state actually ends up endorsing and legitimizing the worst stereotypes on which wage differences have been traditionally based. It should come as no surprise then, that as wage differentials receive 'public' sanction in the ways men and women are compensated for their labour, legitimacy for the unequal sharing of resources is further reinforced within the 'private' domain of the household. These findings are endorsed from other regions of India as well.

Employers use ideologically based norms of physical inferiority and 'preference' for domestic work to justify women's relatively poor contractual status in labour markets. Women are not seeking out inferior contracts but their choices are constrained by conventions within the matrix of 'male dominated institutions', involving most characteristically conventions around female access to education, to nutrition and health care and socially sanctioned views on their suitability for certain tasks and occupations.[31]

Bardhan found for instance, that wherever the domestic burden on women resulted in restrictive women's labour participation, employers found it increasingly to their own advantage to discriminate between the wages they offered male and female labourers.[32]

In eastern UP, women and children form a considerably high proportion of the labour force precisely because their labour proves to be economical for the employer and also because men from these areas seek employment in domains other than agriculture. Where the harvester is fast replacing the agricultural labourer in areas of mechanized cultivation, women labourers are being left with almost no alternative sources of income. The problem of the low wage rate is compounded by the fact that on an average, no more than 35–40 days of continuous wage work is available per season within agriculture.

The pattern observed in agriculture is also faced by traditional crafts-persons and artisans such as potters, oil-pressers, metal workers, blacksmiths, basket makers, fisher-folk etc., with caste-based specializations so integral to the rural economy, who are now finding their traditional skills eclipsed and rendered irrelevant by the onslaught of the market and the forces of globalization.

The struggle for equitable wages is based on the presumption of minimum income availability through wage work which would be necessary for household survival in the absence of alternative sources of income. The implications for women of the closure of all sources of wage work was seen in Manikpur, Banda, when entire villages of Kol women residing on the edge of reserved forests, reverted to dependence on forest produce for the satisfaction of daily needs. In this region where trespassing through the forest or felling wood for fuel and fodder is forbidden, women have no alternative but to spend several hours in the collection of wood, transporting it to the nearest railway station, averaging a distance of 5 km per day; then undertaking a hazardous railway journey with the head-load to be sold in the nearest township and return by train – the entire activity packed into a single day from sunrise to sundown. During daylight hours, village habitations are emptied of their able-bodied men, who seek work in quarries and of women who depend on firewood and forest produce for livelihoods. As men's work is even more erratic, household survival depends on the daily earnings of women from the sale of head-loads averaging Rs. 20, which goes towards meeting the daily food requirements after bribing petty railway officials and forest guards for looking the other way.

In the context of such glaring limitations in access to any kind of productive resources, the availability of seasonal or wage work even with earnings several notches below the minimum wage is still a preferred alternative for tiding over the worst periods in the year. It is not surprising therefore, that in many regions of UP, merely the demand for wage work is likely to precede a battle for minimum wages or their equitable distribution by gender. The wage issue and its significance for women have to be understood within the context of unfinished land reforms where women's access to land and productive resources remains a chimera. Apart from the scarcity of work and wage-related disparities experienced by women, there are other significant discriminatory practices in agriculture hindering women's access to resources, which are likely to continue unless the main issue of land reforms and land redistribution is squarely addressed. In the section below, we examine more direct links between land reform and women's livelihood security and the way the women's movement has perceived and asserted that link.

IV

LAND ISSUES AND WOMEN

Gender-blind Development Paradigms and Land Redistribution

The link between the unfinished business of land reforms and the non-existence of women's land rights is gradually being perceived and systematically established both individually and collectively. In highlighting this link and in bringing land reforms to the centrestage of the woman question, the women's movement has played a pioneering role since the early 1980s. Instead of the state's top-down central administrative role in identifying, acquiring and distributing land, decentralized village-level peasant and labour organizations are taking over the task and even emerging as primary bodies for the provision of credit, other inputs and infrastructural facilities. Grass-roots women's organizations are likewise playing a meaningful role.

In consonance with a gradual shift in male-centric concerns of development paradigms, a gendered understanding of the issue of land reform is called for. That the issue is now broad based enough to also concern women interested in securing rights over land, by no means implies that the state is likely to view the business of land reform with greater favour. Rather, the evidence points to the contrary. It does, however, constitute an important element in the democratization process whereby groups, formerly disadvantaged, seek redress through an assertion of rights. It is likely therefore, that as women begin to see their own stakes in ensuring that the state fulfill its land reform agenda, such pressure will secure the intended results in the long term.

From an insistence on joint *pattas* wherever land was being redistributed to the landless, the demand for women's land rights today extends to encompass access and control over valued productive resources, particularly where the very survival of communities and families is dependent on women. Thus it is in those pockets where conditions are most exploitative, or in those with a recent history of peoples struggles for land, resources or secure tenancies, that women are taking it upon themselves to raise uncomfortable questions about the undelivered promises of land reforms, invariably leading up to questions about entitlements and access to a whole range of resources, not land alone. Where women are gradually organizing themselves, new strategies are being evolved to gain control over land and important pressure groups are emerging.

In the caste hierarchy of Banda, for instance, these comprise the Kol tribals (who are not recognized as a scheduled caste in UP) and the scheduled caste of Chamars. The overlap of caste and class hierarchies on the lower rungs is noteworthy in this region, making for cumulative inequalities. In the move towards globalization, it is these categories which face imminent marginalization. These women are solely dependent on agriculture and their contributions to agricultural production are more, if not at least on par with the men of their households. Except for ploughing, they perform all manner of hard work round the clock.

The gender blindness which is epitomized by the slogan 'land to the tiller' has persisted, so that even in cases where women did get small land grants in their names, a number of factors may prevent them from effectively utilizing the lands. For example Indrakali, a landless labourer of Manikpur, Banda, received five *bighas* of land, which, however continued to remain in the hands of the previous male occupier despite the land being measured nine times and the issue being raised repeatedly in the Manikpur *junta durbar* (people's courts). Efforts to identify and measure allotted lands and thus gain occupation of *patta* lands are compounded where the beneficiaries are women. As boundaries are not demarcated, bribery has become commonplace, with further disadvantages for cash-deprived landless women. Similar stories across the state confirm that the process of land allotment was accomplished by allotting the land on paper, without ascertaining whether or not it was already occupied, or if indeed the allottee managed to take possession of it.

Problems of Land Distribution: Pattas

As discussed elsewhere,[33] in Banda, *pattas* were issued over 300 hectares of forest land but the *pattaholders* did not receive their occupancy rights over them for 20–30 years. There are 6000 cases pending decisions in courts in Bundelkhand and Banda alone. Between *patta* holders and the forest department, approximately 20,000 *bighas* of land stand disputed. In the study villages, *pattas* themselves typically constituted fairly small or inadequate holdings sometimes issued on barren lands, in submerged sections of river banks, disputed territories or forest lands. Very often the fact that there were more than two claimants on a single *patta* led to litigation and dispute. The problems of double entry are commonplace. In one case which came to light in Banda, a zamindar declared 13 people dead and occupied their lands. Most disputes concerned lands which powerful landlords had released to meet the ceiling requirements but which they continued to cultivate and over which their rights remained unquestioned within the community.[34] These kinds of contexts within which some women were hoping to exercise their rights over *pattas* reinforced a sense of futility among them and the conviction that by virtue of being women, land rights would be denied to them, in spite of the state's promises and its rhetoric of gender parity.

Interviews in Banda villages point to the strategies adopted by the rural elite to keep the landless poor divided, as a result of which the ultimate losers were invariably the women. In the village Harijanpur, Banda, where I spent several days, both Chamars and Kols were equal contenders for scarce resources. Here it was in the interest of the village elite to keep alive the contentious issue of undemarcated pattas. By delaying action on measurement and demarcation of plots, ex-landlords continued to retain possession of their surplus lands as well as establish controls over disputed *gaon samaj* lands. Landlords typically dragged the case to court and then obtained stay orders, putting a stop to cultivation on the plot for decades.[35]

It is women from the deprived groups outlined above, who have found themselves drawn into such battles against the state, its legal machinery and the powerful local elites. An illustrative case is that of Ram Lalli, a Harijan woman who managed to get her five *bigha* plot finally measured out and demarcated after a number of administrative difficulties spanning almost 20 years. Barren and stony, the plot required painstaking labour to make it cultivable. Once the mustard crop she sowed on it was ripe and ready for harvesting, Kol labourers, instigated by the local zamindars, threatened her at gunpoint and then harvested the crop, leaving her with no resort but the bitterness of a lawsuit once again![36] The literature is replete with examples of blatant class conflicts which are reported and described as caste animosities. The overlapping of caste and class on the top and bottom rungs of social hierarchies further conceals the real nature of these struggles for control over productive resources in the countryside. As women are embedded within caste and class, it would be erroneous to see their struggles as removed and isolated from these structural contexts.

It is estimated that there are 25 lakh *bataidars* (concealed tenancies) in UP. The recognition of this fact constitutes a first step in grappling with the phenomenon; any move towards recognition of the rights of *bataidars* leads to the withdrawal of lands from tenants. A variety of bataidari arrangements were found to be in existence. In Jaunpur, the backward castes such as Kewats, Gadariyas and Julahas take lands on *adhiya*, i.e. on a fifty-fifty crop sharing basis. The most marginalized sections are unable to enter even into these arrangements owing to a lack of factors of production-implements, irrigation facilities and most importantly, the ploughshare and bullocks.

Where tenancy arrangements are entered into by households of marginal peasants, women are extremely knowledgeable about the terms and conditions of the leases. These households engage in tenancy often under very stringent conditions, precisely because they can draw upon the labour of their women. As the household must bear the cost of the production, usually 50 per cent in the region, what can be retained after production costs have been met and the landlord's share in the produce deducted, constitutes the surplus obtained by maximizing family labour. Hence the maximum number of labour hands the household can draw upon without hiring additional help, could make the crucial relative difference between the well-off and impoverished households. It is not, therefore, in the least surprising to find women uniformly well versed about tenancy arrangements as well as about the most effective agricultural practices, this knowledge in turn representing an awareness of the stakes in their survival as a farming unit.[37]

In many areas of UP, dominant landlords occasionally draw upon the labour of their tenants, particularly when the latter enter into credit relationships with their landlords either for small consumption loans or for purposes of production. In these situations it is often the women of the poor peasant households who face the brunt of the exploitative production relations by contributing free labour as landlords' threat of withdrawal of lease prevails. Alternatively, loans may be adjusted against the sharecropping proceeds.[38]

Since women's contributions to agricultural production have hitherto been ignored, households involved in tenancy arrangements offered a unique opportunity to concretely assess the extent and nature of women's labour. In determining, for the purposes of research, the extent of women's labour which remains unrecognized and uncompensated, women themselves began to make the link between their work on the land and the corresponding need for entitlements on it. Where women are making these connections, their involvement in local struggles has strengthened the overall demands for the completion of land reforms and the agenda of land redistribution. Given women's stakes in land and inheritance rights over it, it is possible that the demand for the registration of tenancies and the terms and conditions of leases will emerge from the women of tenant households.

V
CREATIVE SOLUTIONS

During the women's workshops held in different *anchals* of UP, when women began to think collectively and in groups to identify the sources of their disadvantages in access to resources, land and credit relative to men, they soon arrived at their own solutions and phrased their demands and goals in accordance with their own immediate needs. What they found worthy enough to struggle for and a set of basic demands emerged from within the group.

(1) We resist:
    slavery within homes and slaving for landlords and cultivators.
(2) We want:
    freedom from male oppression as well as from the haves in society
(3) We demand:
    rights over adequate land to feed our families,
    rights over the earnings from our labour.
    the right to a square meal a day
    the right to education and information
    residential rights in both natal and marital homes
    rights on lands over which we toil, equal rights with husbands over lands and products of labour.[37]

To understand the way in which women perceive their own relationship to land, the workshops sought to focus discussion on the issues of (1) rural women's specific problems, (2) gendered nature of rural work (3) gender based wage differentials (4) issues that cause and fuel women's resentment (5) nature of rights demanded by women.

The discussion groups debated questions pertaining to reasons for lack of women's rights; impediments to women's exercising rights; how women's rights to land will alter women's lives; the modalities for acquiring land rights; measure of land adequate for an average-sized family/household survival; potential contenders in the struggle for land; the significance of collective struggles etc.

Interestingly, the Naugarh women arrived at the figure of 5 bighas as a unit of land sufficient for producing a crop of 25 *maunds/bigha* which would have the potential of raising 125 *maunds* of paddy, i.e.75 *maunds* of rice. For the *rabi* crop the same land would yield, 30 *maunds* of wheat. The women worked out further, that on an average as an individual consumes 9 *maunds* of grain per year, an average family would require 45–50 *maunds* of grain, and the total yield would also cover other household expenses including medicines, education, fertilizer seeds, rents, interest on loans etc. On the other hand, the Banda women at Manikpur, suggested that for a 5 member household, 20 *bighas* would be adequate. The women worked out that owing to inadequate irrigation and one crop yields, the 20 *bighas* would be divided into halves for *rabi* and *kharif.* In 10 *bighas,* 15–20 quintals of *jwar, arhar, bajra* and paddy is grown while in *rabi* the same amount of gram, *jowar* and *tilhan* could be produced. As an individual consumes 8–10 *maunds* of grain a year, the yield would be adequate for a family and other expenses could be met through occasional wage work or the collection and sale of tendu leaves.

The demand for work by women is in fact a recurring one. Hitherto the problem has been addressed superficially by a plethora of state and non-governmental organizations which have predictably concentrated on a variety of income-generation schemes. The latter have a limited effect as they are not equipped to deal with long-term structural questions. For long-term and sustained change capable of empowering women with access to productive resources over which the women have undisputed control, collective ownership or collective rights to cultivation over *gaon sabha* lands or government forests, orchards etc. has yielded results. Where the state has been able to wrest lands away from large landholders after meeting ceiling requirements or dispossessed the powerful from control over *gaon sabha* lands, such holdings can be potentially available for women's collectivities.

When examining the possibility of making available commons for the use of women's collectivities, some historical insights are likely to provide solutions. For instance in the case of common lands, distinctions need to be made between lands which were traditionally freely available for use and those which were available for members of the community as well as portions which were owned collectively by the state or the community. Village histories testify to the availability of unclaimed lands which were claimed by entire bodies of castes, sometimes at the edge of village settlements to escape landlord oppressions. Banda villages illustrate the presence of unclaimed lands.

The *wajib-ul-arz* (the record of rights) of villages are even more interesting as they document the existence of certain lands being used at will by villagers and other types of lands on which landlords regulated use, the status of users being a factor in these considerations. The layering of rights on the same piece of land, the social and ritual distinctions associated with land which were sought to be overlooked as land became private property, are significant areas which need to be reviewed anew. Colonial history of the increasing privatization of land, the blurring of proprietary and use rights; the elimination of the categories of waste land and the devolution of unclaimed lands to the state; the reopening of enquiries into such processes may provide the key to restoring and indeed reinstating the rights of many marginalized communities.

During fieldwork it was found that in some pockets at least, the practice of providing land for use as part-payment for agricultural labour still persists. In pre-Independence times, this practice was likely to have blurred distinctions between the categories of landlord, peasant and labourer. A revival of such creative arrangements and alternatives in lieu of wage for work presents another possibility where women's seasonal cultivation could thrive and the poor peasant's land hunger be assuaged.

In recent years, the experiment of women's cooperative societies exercising control over and management of fish ponds in Madhubani district in north Bihar, may be cited as another instance of a creative solution for women's control over productive resources. Despite the fact that pond management for fish cultivation cannot be equated with agrarian production, it still holds important lessons for women's cooperative activities and in principle at least, provides important insights into the processes involved and what is likely to be achieved. At the initiative of Adithi, a local NGO in Madhubani, several women's cooperative societies comprised largely of women of the Mallah (fisher) caste have successfully been managing village ponds since the 1980s. Over the years, the women have made the cooperatives financially viable, gained security for themselves and their families and in the process achieved a considerable degree of empowerment. A notable feature of the process is that it is a continuous one as ponds are auctioned off for specified periods ranging from 3 to 10 years, after which they lapse to the state and the bidding starts again. Hence cooperatives which registered success in the 1980s are already at the juncture when they must compete with influential bidders to retain control over what the members see as their own collective and self-created source of livelihood security.

Beginning with the formation of the societies; their registration for claiming the ponds; participation in the auctions; raising of loans to meet the down payments; settling disputes with other claimants and members of the village power elite who had traditionally enjoyed and often usurped the rights to common property resources; all these form the recent historical memory of the cooperatives. It is through these processes and the gains and struggles which punctuate them, that women have emerged strengthened and confident of their abilities. The subsequent processes involving the raising of finances to purchase the spawn, guarding of ponds against thefts, keeping accounts, apportioning the tasks, selling the produce and disbursing and sharing profits, are activities which have shaped their emergence as productive economic agents. As women point out, the experience and skill of managing homes on scarce resources have been handy even in managing the fish pond cooperatives..

VI
CONCLUSION

Here we have argued that gender blindness in the understanding of the nature of agrarian production has combined with male-centred development paradigms to exclude women as beneficiaries of the state's land reform initiatives. This has in large measure contributed to the land reform exercise being incomplete and truncated. The failure of the state and societal discourse to perceive women as productive members at par with males and as equal partners in the productive enterprise of the farming household, severely handicaps women throughout life. In restoring the imbalance and moving women to the centre of the land reform agenda, it is possible to rethink the issue in more creative ways. Civil society initiatives in several pockets of Uttar Pradesh have been largely responsible for broadening the terms of the land rights discourse so as to encompass a gamut of issues relating to women's access to productive resources.

In tracing the linkages between women's landlessness, insecurity of alternative sources of livelihood and dependent status, our findings demonstrate the centrality of women's lack of access to land and resources. Lack of credit facilities and unfavourable tenancy arrangements were found to be much harsher for women of marginalized castes and classes.

Our fieldwork also shows that rural women in UP are striving for recognition as actors and decision-makers with regard to their survival options. Gender differentials in wages, the disadvantages their variety spells for women, and the contractual terms which invariably favour the employer, have long been distinctive features of UP's rural scene. Parity in wage structures and implementation of the minimum wage, are emerging as central concerns in the countryside.

Our findings reveal the ways in which the brunt of labourers' resistance is invariably borne by women of labouring households and point to some of the compulsions which inhibit women's resistance. Men's struggles to redress exploitative wage structures are often facilitated by the lack of freedom for women and ways in which they are implicated in labour processes. Where resistance by male labourers has yielded some results and also achieved relative gender parity in wages, new forms of social relationships are emerging.

Finally, how women perceive their own relationship with the land they cultivate is likely to offer clues about possible strategies for strengthening women's access and control. The transformative potential for structural change in the countryside is reflected in the success of several small initiatives designed with women's centrality in agrarian production. The recording and documentation of such initiatives and the processes they involve could provide a significant framework for creative solutions, besides preserving women's historical and collective memories.

NOTES

Note: This article is dedicated to Vina Mazumdar, pioneer, visionary and educationist on her seventy-fifth birthday.

1. Bharati, *'Mahila Evam Bhoomi Adhikar. Kshetriya Karyashala ki Report 1999-2000'*, Uttar Pradesh Bhoomi Sudhar Evam Shram Adhikar Abhiyan Samiti, 2000 (Limited circulation).
2. P. Brass, 'The Politicization of the Peasantry in a North Indian State I', *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. 7, no. 4, 1980, pp. 395–426; Z. Hasan, *Dominance and Mobilisation. Rural Politics in Western Uttar Pradesh*, New Delhi: Sage, 1989; Z. Hasan, *Quest for Power. Oppositional Movements and Post-congress Politics in Uttar Pradesh*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998; I. Dunca, 'Party Politics and the North Indian Peasantry: The Rise of the Bharatiya Kranti Dal in Uttar Pradesh', *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. 16, no. 1, 1997 pp. 40–76.
3. E.G. Thukral, 'Development, Displacement and Rehabilitation: Locating Gender', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 15 June 1996, p. 1500.
4. Ibid.
5. Abhiyan Samiti, Lucknow, Workshop Report, 15–17 March, 1997.
6. Lucia da Corta and D. Venkateshwarlu, 'Unfree Relations and the Feminisation of Agricultural Labour in Andhra Pradesh 1970-95', *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. 26, nos. 2/3, 1999, pp. 71–137.
7. Abhiyan Samiti Workshop Report, Lucknow 15–17 March 1997.
8. J. Lerche, 'Agricultural Labourer, the State and Agrarian Transition in Uttar Pradesh' *Economic and Political Weekly*, March 28, 1998.
9. B. Agarwal, *A Field of One's Own*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
10. Abhiyan Samiti Workshop, Naugarh, Chandauli, Varanasi, 13–15 October 1997.
11. Ibid.
12. Bharati, *'Mahila Evam Bhoomi Adhikar'*.
13. A unique survey of concealed tenancy in twelve districts of UP planned by the Land Reforms Unit, Lal Bahadur Shastri Academy, Mussoorie and executed by the Abhiyan Samiti with the involvement of over 60 grassroots activists who received training in survey methods from Lal Bahadur Shastri Academy was completed in May 1998. However, the findings of the survey remain unpublished.
14. H. Binswanger and Rosenzweig, M.R. (eds.), *Contractual Arrangements, Employment and Wages in Rural Labour markets in Asia*, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1984, p. 33.
15. Ibid.
16. R.D. Singh, 'Female Agricultural Workers' Wages, Male-Female Wage Differentials, and Agricultural Growth in a Developing Country, India', *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, vol. 45, no. 1, 1996, pp. 89–123.
17. Ibid., p. 117.
18. Ahluwalia, 'Rural Poverty and Agricultural Performance in India', *The Journal of Development Studies*, vol. 4, no. 3, 1978, pp. 298–323.

19. R.D. Singh, 'Female Agricultural Workers' Wages', p. 92.
20. B. Rogaly, 'Linking Home and Market Towards a Gendered Analysis of Changing Labour Relations in Rural West Bengal', *IDS Bulletin*, vol. 28, no. 3, July 1997, p. 14.
21. R. Srivastava, 'Rural Labour in Uttar Pradesh: Emerging Features of Subsistence, Contradiction and Resistance', T. J. Byres, K. Kapadia and J. Lerche (eds.), *Rural Labour Relations in India*, New Delhi: India Research Press, 1997.
22. J. Lerche, 'Politics of the Poor: Agricultural Labourers and Political Transformations in Uttar Pradesh', ibid., p. 19.
23. Corta and Venkateshwarlu found in Andhra Pradesh that nearly half the cases of household downward mobility since 1988 were the result of the loss of the male head. Thus female downward mobility occurs among women who become heads of their families with death or separation of the male head and consequent appropriation of their lands by the husband's male kin for reconstituting the patriarchal holding or through distress sales or mortgages, Corta and Venkateshwarulu, 'Unfree Relations and the Feminisation of Agricultural Labour', p. 105.
24. J. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, London: Yale University Press, 1985.
25. G. Hart, 'Engendering Everyday Resistance: Gender, Patronage and Production Politics in Rural Malaysia', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. 19, no.1, 1991, pp. 93–121.
26. Ibid.
27. P. Brass, 'Yet More on Agrarian Change and Unfree Labour', *Economic and Political Weekly,* vol. 31, no. 4, 1995, pp. 237–40.
28. Ibid.
29. This is in sharp contrast to agricultural trends in Tamil Nadu where a strengthening of the position of women labourers was observed by Kapadia. Here employers need women labourers and there is increasingly less work for male labourers. In Tamil Nadu, unlike UP's Barsara village, it was always the Scheduled Caste women of the Pallar caste who initiated strikes while the Pallar men followed. The latter also lacked group solidarity unlike their women. Here it was the men who maintained the former 'tied' labouring relationships with their former landlords and were reluctant to antagonize their former employers. Interestingly, as Pallar women were excluded from the male patron-client relations, they lost nothing by initiating wage demands. In the rice transplanting season in W. Bengal, for instance, Rogaly found that women's earnings were higher than those of men despite the fact that landlords combined labour tying arrangements with the hiring of seasonal migrant workers to keep wages down. Clearly 'labour market processes are shaped by as well as at the same time influencing which women and men in worker households do which unwaged work and how that changes over time.' Ibid.
30. Abhiyan Samiti Land Rights Workshop, Varanasi, 20–22 December 1997.
31. A. Evans, 'Contracted-out: Some Reflections on Gender, Power and Agrarian Institutions', *IDS Bulletin*, vol. 24, no. 3, July 1993, pp. 25–26.
32. K. Bardhan, 'Economic growth, poverty and rural labour markets in India: a survey of research', *Working Paper 54, Rural Employment Policy Research Programme*, International Labour Organisation, 1983.

While men were seen to be disloyal by employers in resisting the full payment of outstanding loans or in seeking to break traditional tied labour arrangements, even in Andhra Pradesh, women were seen as attempting to regain their access to credit by performing unpaid and low paid tied wage work. As a consequence of women's greater involvement in tied work, average female daily earnings as a percentage of male daily earnings was only 53.3 per cent, substantially lower than the daily wage differentials for AP at 71.0 per cent. See Corta and Venkateshwarlu, ' Unfree Relations', p. 110.

33. S.T. Jassal, *Daughters of the Earth. Women and Land in Uttar Pradesh*, New Delhi: Manohar, 2001, pp. 144–168.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid.
37. 'Scheduled caste and landless women', Abhiyan Samiti Workshop, Naugarh, Varanasi district, 13 October 1999, 'Field-notes for Survey on Concealed Tenancy', Banda 1998, unpublished.

CHAPTER 13

Some Dimensions of Female Employment in India

Sudha Deshpande

INTRODUCTION

Human development implies the capacity to expand range of choices and opportunities that will enable individuals to improve their capabilities to lead a better quality of life. By capability we mean individual's ability to function in different capacities as a component of a family, household and society. Labour market being a social institution, individual's ability to participate in it as a supplier of labour is an important capability that needs special attention. In a society prerequisites that enable individuals to acquire these capabilities are difficult to identify. Yet we could say that at any level of development men/women must have three essential choices. First to lead a long and healthy life, second to have access to knowledge through education and information and finally to have access to resources, which depends crucially on the freedom man/women have to work and earn a decent living. Of these three the last one is important in the context of labour market.

Indian constitution guarantees to every citizen equal social, political and economic rights irrespective of sex. Despite this, development of women had a low profile in the early phases of Indian planning, mainly because women were then viewed as beneficiaries of social services rather than contributors to development. Towards Equality: The Report of the Committee on Status of Women (1974) and Shramashakti concerned with, the work self-employed women did in the informal sector of the Indian economy (1988) gathered invaluable data on invisible contribution of Indian women to their own households and to the economy. They highlighted the issues that demanded urgent attention from policy makers. The Eighth Five Years Plan (1992/97), as a result made a conscious attempt to outline a strategy to ensure that the benefits of development did not bypass women and would enable them to participate as equal partners and participants in development on par with men. The Approach paper to The Ninth Plan (1997/2002) too envisaged an integrated approach to empowerment of women and laid stress on changes in the attitudes of the society to the role of women in different spheres of life. Unfortunately, women, even after fifty years of independence continue to experience social and economic inequality based on gender.[1]

This paper is an attempt to analyse some aspects of this gender-based inequality that women experience in the labour market in India. This inequality is all pervading and exists in all sectors of the economy in rural and urban India. For analysing trends in women's employment in India, two data sources form our database: censuses conducted every ten years and sample surveys on employment–unemployment conducted every five years by the National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO). Non-comparability of the basic concepts mars comparability of census data before 1961 with those after it. Moreover uniformity of definitions of work and workers further restricts our comparison to the data of the last three censuses, 1981, 1991 and 2001. NSSO data are not only comprehensive, but also are available from six survey rounds from 1972/73 to 1999/2000, of which the first is not strictly comparable with the five that followed. Barring some rudimentary data relating to workers, data on most economic characteristics of workers in 2001 Census are yet to be published. We have therefore relied heavily on the NSSO data to bring out the gender-based inequality which women face in the Indian labour market.

Section I after explaining the basic concepts and definitions used in our data sources gives an overview of the levels and trends in women's participation in the labour market. The analysis is restricted to the period 1977/78 to 1999/2000. Closeness of the 55th Round of NSSO in 1999/2000 and 2001 Census for the first time provides valuable insight into comparability of these two sets of data and helps us understand why and how the two data sources differ. Section II analyses disparities in the employment structure of men and women in rural and urban India and informs us how it has changed over time. With scanty data that are at our disposal, we have tried to see whether women have access to employment on par with men, in the organized and manufacturing sector. In Section III our attempt is to highlight gender-based discrimination which women experience within their homes before they enter the labour market and continue to face it after their entry into it. Policy implications emerging from the earlier discussion are summed up in Section IV.

I. TRENDS IN LEVEL OF FEMALE PARTICIPATION IN INDIA

Basic Concepts and Definitions

Labour force consists of the employed and the unemployed. The employed or the workers participate in the production of goods and services for pay or profit while the unemployed are not at work but are actively in search of it. Together they constitute the labour supply available in any economy. Though identification of workers and unemployed is simple in developed countries, it is not so in developing countries like India. Most farm and non-farm production in these countries is family based and in agriculture, highly seasonal. All members of the farm household work in peak season but some of them, especially women, children and the aged may withdraw from labour force in the slack season. Many farm households in subsistence agriculture consume what they produce. Household industry may produce for the market, but participation of members of the household in production may be intermittent. This makes identification of workers, unemployed and persons outside the labour force difficult.

Besides, employment or work, is a multidimensional concept. Work takes time to perform, it must be productive resulting in output, it should remunerate the worker for the work done and lastly the person working and the society should recognize her/him as a worker. No single measure of employment and hence unemployment can capture this multidimensional nature of work. Moreover even if we restrict ourselves to one of these dimensions, say time as most data sources do, different reference periods yield different estimates, each of which reflects the reality relevant to that reference period.

Since a person is identified as a worker if and only if he or she is engaged in an economic activity, measurement is highly sensitive to how we define economic activity. According to the International Labour Office (ILO), economic activities can be either market activities or non-market activities. Market activities are those in which one produces goods and services for pay or profit. The non-market activities are production of primary products for own consumption, processing of primary commodities for own consumption and own account production of fixed assets.[2]

Labour Force Data in India

Enumeration of all workers in general and that of women workers in particular has been a challenge for policy makers in India. Yet identification and measurement of workers are necessary since it is expected to help in the formulation of employment policy and planning. In a male dominated society like India that accepts men as bread-winners, men are more likely to get enumerated as workers than women who are regarded essentially as home makers. The censuses and the NSSO surveys, the former much more than the latter, find it difficult to net women in their count of workers primarily because of the multiple roles women play in the household that makes their work invisible. More often than not women do not recognize themselves as workers, nor do other members of the household do so. Enumerators might not consider work done by women at home, as economic work since there is very thin line that differentiates economic work they do from their housework especially in rural India. Women workers in urban India are more visible than their rural sisters, as they are more likely to be wage employees and regular salaried workers. But urban women self-employed or working from home in the informal sector could, at times, be missed from the count of workers.

Both the sources, the censuses and the NSSO surveys, share these difficulties of a general nature. However a relatively higher count of women workers, resulting in their higher work participation rates in the NSSO surveys relatively to censuses, is often attributed and rightly so, to the well-trained permanent investigators who are under careful supervision of the NSSO.[3] Census organization in the absence of permanent staff is forced to depend on government employees and primary teachers for enumeration, who are offered only token honorarium for their work. They have very little interest in the task assigned to them or rather imposed on them, which results in an undercount of women workers in the census and thereby lowers their participation rates compared to the NSSO surveys.

Concepts and definitions used to define work and workers differ between the two data sources. To minimize the impact of transient or seasonal factors on the level of economic activity of both men and women, censuses since 1961 and the NSSO surveys from the early 1970s have adopted the usual status approach, which tries to ascertain economic status of a person during the previous year. As both have a comparable reference period of a year, in what follows we discuss the concept of economic activity and definitions used to identify workers in these two data sets.

Definitions in the Census and the NSSO Sample Surveys

Census

Labour force approach replaced the gainful worker approach to enumerate workers in 1961 Census. Experimenting with the definition of workers in 1961 and 1971 by 1981 finally the Census authorities were able to arrive at a definition of a worker that was suited to Indian conditions. The concepts of work and workers have remained basically the same in the two censuses that followed. But care taken to include women, children and the aged in the count of workers has increased over time. Census follows the ILO in its definition of economic activity and includes all market activities but of all non-market activities, includes only production of primary goods for own consumption but excludes processing of primary commodities for own consumption and own account production of fixed assets from its definition. In 2001 Census the scope of definition of economic activity was expanded marginally to include production of milk for domestic consumption, thus bringing it closer to ILO's definition of economic work.

Census of 1981, and the two that followed in 1991 and 2001, recognized a person as a worker if he had worked "any time at all" in the 365 days prior to the enumerator's visit to the household. He was classified as a main worker if he had worked at least for 183 days or more and as a marginal worker if he had worked for less than 183 days. So the censuses in India try first to enumerate the workforce in the total population and then depending on whether they worked for more or less than 183 days during the previous year, classify them as main or marginal workers.

The NSSO

The NSSO's definition of economic work matches the ILO's in all respects except one. The ILO recognizes processing of primary products for home consumption as economic activity; the NSSO does not. Thus, the NSSO's definition is narrower than that of the ILO's but wider than that of the Census's. The NSSO measures time dimension of work by using three reference periods, the year, the week and every day of the week prior to the investigator's visit to the household. In doing so it captures the reality of intermittent work, characteristic of India, far more closely than the census.[4]

Though this is so as most other economic characteristics are available for workers by usual status and more importantly since we want to compare with those obtained from the Census, our analysis is based largely on this status. In the usual status approach in the NSSO surveys, a person is assigned the category of a worker, unemployed and of being out of labour force according to the activity in which he/she had spent relatively longer time of the year preceding the survey. Accordingly, he/she is classified as employed, unemployed or out of labour force. Those who are classified by major time spent criterion as employed are called principal workers. It is possible that those who are classified either as unemployed or as being out of labour force may have participated in economic activity in a subsidiary capacity. Those who do so are classified by the NSSO as subsidiary workers. So the NSSO essentially classifies population into those who are in the labour force and those who are out of it. This has, as we shall see later, important implications for the comparison of work participation rates (WPRs) that are reported from the NSSO with those reported in the census.

Levels and Trends in Work Participation Rates

Table 1 gives the ratio of workers per 100 persons enumerated in the relevant population, often called work participation rates (WPRs) by sex and rural urban residence in India from the censuses and the NSSO from 1977/78 to 2001. NSSO reports WPRs for 5+ population, but barring 1999/2000, we have given them for total population too.[5] Because of closeness of WPRs for total population and those reported for population 5 years and over, in the survey rounds from 1977/78 to 1993/94, WPRs for 1999/2000 have not been adjusted to relate to total population.

Following conclusions emerge from the table. Irrespective of the year and the source, men were economically more active than women, both in rural and urban India. Irrespective of the source of data, WPRs of rural men were only marginally higher than those of men who worked in urban India but rural women were far more active economically than their urban sisters in all the years to which the data relate. The labour market in India preferred men to women probably as the latter were assigned the role of home-makers by the society. Curiously enough, the WPRs for men, rural and urban, reported by the census were only marginally lower than those reported from the NSSO survey, closest to the census year. This was not true for women; census reported female WPRs were much lower than in those reported by the NSSO, irrespective of their rural-urban residence, supporting the claim that NSSO enumerated women workers than the census.

WPR for men, irrespective of source, hovered around 54 for rural men and declined only marginally by the end of the last century while that for urban men remained more or less constant at 50-51, throughout the period under consideration. WPRs reported by the NSSO, for rural and urban women too were marginally lower in 1999/2000 than in 1977/78 while those reported for women in the census had increased over time. Special efforts of the Census Office to net women workers by making enumerators aware of women's economic activities had resulted in the observed increase over time. A part of the increase especially between 1991 and 2001 could also be due to the inclusion of production of milk for consumption, as an economic activity in 2001 Census.[6]

Table 1
Work Participation Rates Reported by Censuses and NSSO Surveys by Sex and Rural-Urban Residence, India, 1961–2001

Work Participation Rates WPRs (All Workers by Usual Status)							
Year	Source	Rural		Urban		Total	
		Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
1977/78	NSSO	54.4	32.6	50.0	15.3	53.4	28.9
NSSO Population	5+	55.2	33.1	50.8	15.6	54.3	29.7
1981	Census	53.8	23.2	49.1	8.3	52.6	19.8
1983	NSSO	54.3	33.7	50.9	14.9	53.5	29.3
Population	5+	54.7	34.0	51.2	15.1	53.8	21.6
1987/88	NSSO	53.9	32.3	50.6	15.2	53.0	28.0
NSSO Population	5+	53.9	32.3	50.6	15.2	53.1	28.5
1991	Census	52.5	26.7	48.9	9.2	51.6	22.3
1993/94	NSSO	55.3	32.8	52.0	15.4	54.5	28.6
NSSO Population	5+	55.3	32.8	52.1	15.5	54.5	28.6
1999/00							
NSSO Population	5+	53.1	29.9	51.8	13.9	52.7	25.9
2001	Census	52.4	31.0	50.8	11.5	51.9	25.7

Note: WPRs in all Censuses are for Main plus Marginal workers related to Total Population.
WPRs in NSSO are for Principal plus Subsidiary workers for 5+ population
WPRs for 1999/2000 are for Population 5+ as reported by NSSO.

Source: Visaria, 1999. Table 2 pp. 26–27.
National Sample Survey Organization, 2001. Table 6.1, p. 67.
Registrar General of India, Census of India 2001.

There is no denial that the differences in levels of participation of women reported in the two data sources are due to their better enumeration in the NSSO than in the census. Most of the NSSO surveys and the census years did not coincide till 2000. However the NSSO's 55th Round in 1999/2000, ended barely 7 months, before 2001 Census gave us an opportunity for the first time to compare the workforce data from the two sources for more or less the same time period. As noted earlier, we have not adjusted the NSSO data for 1999/2000 which relate to population 5 years and over, if they were to be adjusted to include population 0-4 in the denominator, they might have been marginally lower than they are now. Even the unadjusted WPRs reported by the NSSO for principal and subsidiary workers come very close to those reported for main plus marginal workers by the census, irrespective of sex and rural-urban residence. This closeness made us probe this issue further.

In Table 2 we have given WPRs for principal and subsidiary workers together and separately in 1999/2000 along with those for all workers and for main and marginal workers among them in the Census 2001. They show that while the NSSO counted principal workers better than subsidiary, the Census enumerated marginal workers better than the main in more or less the same time period. The primary concern of the Census is to identify workers in the population and then classify some of them as main workers *if and only if* they had worked for more than 183 days. The rest were classified as marginal workers. In the NSSO, if during the previous year, a person were to work for 5 months, remain unemployed for 4 months and were to be out of labour force for the rest of the year that is three months, he would be classified as a worker by principal status. But if we were to go by the census he would not fulfill the requirement of being classified as a main worker. In this sense the census definition of a main worker that requires a person to work for *at least 183 days or six months,* is stricter in reality, than that of the NSSO's for classifying a worker as a principal status worker. In India where most of the agricultural activity depends on monsoons, agricultural season may vary between regions. In many parts of India agricultural season may last for less than half a year. But the NSSO would classify such a person as principal status worker while the census would not. It is possible to say that the difference in the basic approach for enumerating workers in the two data sources probably results in higher participation rates of principal compared to subsidiary workers in the NSSO and higher participation rates of marginal than main workers of the census. Therefore if both sets of workers are considered together the difference is but marginal. Time gap between the previous censuses and NSSO survey rounds prevented us from making such comparisons. But as the NSSO's survey in 1999/2000 and 2001 Census shared more or less the same reference period which made this comparison possible.

Table 2

Work Participation Rates, Main and Marginal in 2001 Census and Principal and Subsidiary Workers in the NSSO Survey 1999/2000 by Sex and Rural-Urban Residence, India

Work Participation Rates WPRs						
Year	Source		Rural		Urban	
			Males	Females	Males	Females
1999/00	NSSO	PS+SS	53.1	29.9	51.8	13.9
		PS	52.2	23.1	51.3	11.7
		SS	0.9	6.8	0.5	2.2
2001	Census	Main+marg	52.4	31.0	50.8	11.5
		Main	44.5	16.8	47.5	9.1
		Marginal	7.9	14.2	3.3	2.4

Note: WPRs from the Census relate workers to total population whereas those from the NSSO relate workers to population 5 years and over.

Source: National Sample Survey Organization, 2001. Table 6.1, p. 67.
Registrar General of India, Census of India 2001.

Role assigned to women as home-makers makes them spend relatively longer time at home in, what are referred to as "care activities", which consist of cooking, cleaning, shopping and other household chores apart from taking care of the children, the old, the sick and the disabled in the household. These activities are called Extended System of National Accounts (SNA) activities that are unpaid in all societies and hence are not taken into account while calculating national income. They are valuable and enhance human well-being but they lie outside the boundaries of conventional economic activities or SNA activities that are carried out for pay or profit and have value in exchange. Time Use Survey undertaken in six states of India vividly brings out the inequality which women are subjected to, through the pattern of time use of men and women in 1998-99. Most of the men are engaged in economic activities that are paid while women, even if they are performing economic activities, they are more likely to carry them out as unpaid family/household workers. Almost nine of every ten women are engaged in extended SNA or "care activities", while barely half of the men are so engaged.[7] The precious work which women perform is not only unpaid but often unnoticed as they are treated unequally in our society.

This unequal burden of housework between men and women within homes, affects women's pattern of participation in the labour market too. Women enter the labour market with a huge burden of housework which men rarely share with them. Table 3 shows that irrespective of the source and the year to which data relate, participation rates of marginal/subsidiary workers among women were higher than those for men, much more so in rural than urban India except those reported in 2001 Census. The subordinate status women have at home is carried to the labour market too where women, overburdened with the work at home may often be forced to accept marginal/subsidiary work. Substantial increase in the marginal participation of both rural and urban men in 2001 probably suggests increasing casualization, the process that was initiated in the 1980s and strengthened in the post-economic reform period.[8]

Table 3

Marginal Workers or Subsidiary Workers as Percentage Share of (a) All Workers and (b) Total Population by Sex and Rural-Urban Residence, India, 1977/78-2001

Year	Rural				Urban			
	Percentage of All Workers		WPRs		Percentage of All Workers		WPRs	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
1977/78	5.5	25.1	1.5	8.3	3	21.2	1.1	3.3
1981	6.0	31.0	1.2	7.2	1.6	12.5	0.6	1.0
1983	4.8	27.1	1.9	9.2	2.6	20.5	1.2	3.1
1987/88	3.2	24.2	2.2	7.8	3.4	22.4	1.0	3.4
1991	6.6	30.0	1.2	8.0	2.2	11.3	0.5	1.1
1993/94	6.2	28.5	1.5	9.4	4.1	22.0	0.6	3.3
1999/00	7.5	22.5	0.9	6.8	4.4	16.8	0.5	2.2
2001	1.8	35.9	7.9	14.2	0.7	17.0	3.3	2.4

Source: Derived from data available from National Sample Survey Organization's Survey Rounds for 1977/78 through 1999/2000 and data available from the Census, 1981, 1991 & 2001.

Summing up we can say that comparison of WPRs of men and women irrespective of source suggest, that even after fifty years of independence and despite the declaration made by the government to empower women, and give them equal opportunities on par with men, women continue to face gender-inequality in the labour market. This inequality is the result, primarily of the criteria adopted to define economic activity that excludes most activities like household work that is done mostly by women. Secondly, the role assigned to women in society forces them to spend most of their time doing activities that are home-based time-consuming and therefore unpaid. These activities have been regarded traditionally as women's activities and men have neither an inclination nor the desire to share them. Under the circumstances, very few women can combine the roles of workers and home-makers. This results in their low level of participation in economic activity. Those who enter the labour market encounter as much inequality there as they did when they were at home. To this we turn to in the sections that follow.

II. GENDER INEQUALITY AND STRUCTURE OF EMPLOYMENT

In this section we try to see how employment structure of women differs from that of men. This section and the next, draw heavily on the NSSO survey data. Starting with employment status distribution we go on to discuss the sectoral and industrial distribution of women to bring out the disparities in their employment structure relative to men. The Directorate General of Employment and Training (D.G.E&T.) in the Ministry of Labour, Government of India routinely generates and publishes data relating to the organized sector in India under their Employment Market Information (EMI) Programme. The information is collected from employers of establishments, both in the public and the private sector, in all industry divisions. We shall see how women fared as workers in the public and private organized sector over the last two decades. Finally with the help of scanty data available to us we have tried to identify manufacturing industries where women are concentrated.

Employment Status

It is alleged that labour laws and union presence restrict the freedom of the employers to hire and fire workers and change employment at the enterprise level. By employing temporary or casual or contract workers employers are known to achieve the necessary flexibility to change the size of employment at the firm level.[9] This results in casualization of the workforce over time, which is regarded as deterioration in the employment status structure of workers.

Employment status distribution in Table 4 shows that in rural India, both men and women were likely to work more as self-employed than wage labourers. If they were in wage employment they were more likely to be in casual than regular wage employment. Share of casual workers, male and female, increased between 1977/78 and 1999/2000. This increase in the case of men was accompanied by a decline in the share of both self-employed and regular salaried workers suggesting some deterioration in the employment structure. But for women the shift from self-employment to casual wage labour could occur because wage employment was available, so it could be an escape from lack of work as self-employed. Over the 1990s this could be a response to the increase in real wages of female casual workers in rural India.[10] Urban men were more likely to work as self-employed or regular salaried than casual workers. Urban male workforce too was more casualized in 1999/2000 than in 1977/78, mainly due to the decline in the share of regular employees, a likely outcome of flexibilization of the urban labour market over years. Urban women had fared relatively better, thanks to the entry of educated women in the labour market especially over the 1990s, their share in regular salaried employment increased.[11] This increase was accompanied by a decline in the share of both self-employed and casual workers among them.

Table 4

Distribution of Workers Usually Employed (P+S) by Employment Status by Sex and Rural-Urban Residence, India, 1977/78-1999/2000

Rural	Males			Females		
Year	Self-employed	Regular salaried	Casual	Self-employed	Regular salaried	Casual
1977/78	62.8	10.6	26.6	62.1	2.8	35.1
1983	60.5	10.3	29.2	61.9	2.8	35.3
1987/88	58.6	10.0	31.4	60.8	3.7	35.5
1993/94	57.9	8.3	33.8	58.5	2.8	38.7
1999/00	55.0	8.8	36.2	57.3	3.1	39.6
Urban	Males			Females		
Year	Self-employed	Regular salaried	Casual	Self-employed	Regular salaried	Casual
1977/78	40.4	46.4	13.2	49.5	24.9	25.6
1983	40.9	43.7	15.4	45.8	25.8	28.4
1987/88	41.7	43.7	14.6	47.1	27.5	25.4
1993/94	41.7	42.1	16.2	45.4	28.6	26
1999/00	41.5	41.7	16.8	45.3	33.3	21.4

Source: National Sample Survey Organization. Results of 1977/78 Survey Round and National Sample Survey Organization. 2001. Table 6.6, p. 73.

Changes in the employment status distribution show that labour market has not been particularly harsh to women. Both rural and urban women were able to escape from the insecurity of income associated with self-employment to wage employment where income is a little more secure, though could be intermittent, in the case of casual work. But compared to urban, rural women were more likely to face this income insecurity as they were more likely to be casually employed than their urban sisters who had done well by taking more to regular salaried employment.

Structure of Employment by Sectors

Economic development is accompanied by a shift in the employment structure away from agriculture or the primary sector, to the secondary and the tertiary sectors in the economy; consequently the share of national income produced in the primary sector declines while that produced in the other two sectors increases. Improvement in the share of employment in the non-farm sector, which connotes employment outside agriculture, is regarded as an indicator of development.

In spite of the massive investments in the non-farm sector of the Indian economy in the five decades of planning, Indian agriculture provides livelihood to a disproportionately high share of country's workforce. The shift in the structure of employment away from agriculture was visible in the 1981 Census and continued, though at a slower pace for men in the next decade. Share of male main workers in the primary sector declined from 70 per cent in 1971 to 66 per cent in 1981 and then to 63 per cent in 1991.[12] However, women were trapped in the primary sector, where eight of every ten women worked in 1981 and a decade later. 2001 Census data available currently are for main and marginal workers together. They do not provide detailed allocation of workers by sectors. But the share of main plus marginal workers working as cultivators and agricultural labourers in the primary sector, was 52.2 per cent for men and 71.9 per cent for women in 2001. Since marginal work is more likely in the primary than other sectors of the economy, shares of main workers are likely to be smaller than those reported here. So according to 2001 Census the non-farm employment must have increased sharply between 1991 and 2001, much more among men than women. More importantly, liberalization of the Indian economy did not completely bypass women but opened up employment opportunities for them outside agriculture, where they were trapped over generations.

Changes in the sectoral distribution reported by the NSSO, for men and women in rural and urban India, given in Table 5 confirm the shift in employment structure away from the primary sector noted in the census. Comparison of the share in 1977/78 with that in 1999/2000 shows that the decline in the share of primary sector was most pronounced for urban women (14.7 percentage points), followed by that for rural men (9.4 percentage points). Marginal decline of 4 percentage points for urban men need not be a cause for concern since in both the years over 90 per cent of them were employed in the non-farm sector of the urban economy. But this was not so with rural women. In their case barely 3 per cent who were working in the primary sector could move out of it suggesting that the rural non-farm sector had very little to offer to them.

The decline in the share of employment in the primary sector was shared differently by the other two sectors among men and women, in rural and urban India. For rural men both secondary and tertiary sectors gained, latter much more than the former. It was the secondary sector rather than tertiary that gained in the case of rural women. In urban India, tertiary sector was the largest beneficiary of the change irrespective of sex. The share of employment in the secondary sector for urban men stagnated while that for urban women declined between 1977/78 and 1999/2000. The shift from farm to non-farm employment, which is inherent in the process of development, was much more visible in the urban than rural sector of the Indian economy. But the change had hardly touched rural women. Men, rural and urban, and urban women shared the benefits of this change, which implied a shift from low paid farm to better paid, non-farm employment.

Table 5
Distribution of Workers by Sector of Employment by Sex and Rural-Urban Residence, India, 1977/78-1999/2000

		Rural			
Males	**1977/78**	**1983**	**1987/88**	**1993/94**	**1999/00**
Primary	80.7	76.9	74.6	74.0	71.3
Secondary	8.8	10.6	12.1	11.2	12.6
Tertiary	10.5	12.5	13.3	14.8	16.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Females	**1977/78**	**1983**	**1987/88**	**1993/94**	**1999/00**
Primary	88.2	86.7	84.8	86.1	85.2
Secondary	6.7	8.1	10.0	8.3	9.0
Tertiary	5.1	5.2	5.2	5.6	5.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
		Urban			
Males	**1977/78**	**1983**	**1987/88**	**1993/94**	**1999/00**
Primary	10.6	10.2	9.1	9.0	6.6
Secondary	33.7	35.1	34.3	33.0	32.8
Tertiary	55.7	54.7	56.6	58.0	60.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Females	**1977/78**	**1983**	**1987/88**	**1993/94**	**1999/00**
Primary	32.0	28.7	30.5	24.7	17.7
Secondary	32.4	32.0	31.3	29.1	29.4
Tertiary	35.6	39.3	38.2	46.2	52.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: National Sample Survey Organization. Results of 1977/78 Survey Round and National Sample Survey Organization. 2001. Table 6.7, pp. 75–76.

Distribution by Industry

Table 6 looks at these changes at the industry level. As noted earlier, primary sector consists of those who work in agriculture. Secondary sector includes mining and quarrying, manufacturing, household and non-household, public utilities like generation of electricity and gas and construction where wage employment generally prevails giving less scope for disguised unemployment. Tertiary sector on the other hand includes trade, transport and storage and community, social and personal services. Of these, trade provides easy entry and thereby offers ample scope to those who are unable to find employment elsewhere in the economy. Growth of trade therefore could lead to the growth of self-employment where incidence of underemployment is likely to be high. Distribution of workers in this table helps us identify growth of the specific industries in the non-farm sector of the economy.

Between 1977/78 and 1999/2000, the shares of construction and trade improved for men, much more for those working in urban than rural India. Share in transport improved for rural men too but share of those in manufacturing and services increased only marginally. Among urban men, the share of employment in manufacturing and services declined steeply. Decline in these shares accompanied by growth of trade that is known to be a hotbed of underemployment suggests some deterioration in the structure of male employment.

Changes in the employment structure for women in the non-farm sector differed between rural and urban India. For rural women the largest improvement of 1.7 percentage points was in the share of manufacturing. In all other industries the increase was less than one per cent. The share of urban women employed in services increased the fastest by 8.3 percentage points, followed by trade, 8.2 percentage points. Construction's gain with 2.6 percentage points was comparatively small. Share of women employed in manufacturing, declined very steeply from almost 30 per cent in 1977/78 to 24 per cent in 1999/2000.

It is difficult to say how women fared relative to men in the industrial sector. Change in the industrial distribution of rural women was but marginal. But increase in the share of employment in trade, was experienced both by rural and urban men and urban women. The increase probably implies that the less educated men and women were finding it difficult to get employment elsewhere in the economy. This was true of employment in construction too. So the labour market treated all of them on par with each other so far as these industries were concerned.

Gender Composition of Employment by Industry

Employment structure by industry could be viewed slightly differently by looking at the share of women in total employment in each industry or to see how "feminized" the industry was. This we have done in Table 7. We find that gender composition by industry has remained more or less stable over years. Relative to their share among total workers, rural women were concentrated in agriculture in all the years to which data relate. For

Table 6
Industrial Distribution of Workers Usually Employed (PS+SS) by Sex and Rural-Urban Residence, India, 1977/78-1999/2000

Rural	1977/78	1983	1987/88	1993/94	1999/00
Males					
Agriculture	80.6	76.9	74.6	74.0	71.4
Mining & Quarrying	0.5	0.6	0.7	0.7	0.6
Manufacturing	6.4	7.2	7.4	7.0	7.3
Electricity, gas, etc.	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.2
Construction	1.7	2.6	3.7	3.2	4.5
Trade	4.0	4.4	5.1	5.5	6.8
Transport & Storage	1.2	1.8	2.0	2.2	3.2
Services	5.3	6.3	6.2	7.1	6.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Females					
Agriculture	88.2	86.7	84.8	86.1	85.4
Mining & Quarrying	0.2	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.3
Manufacturing	5.9	6.9	6.9	7.0	7.6
Electricity, gas, etc.	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0
Construction	0.6	0.9	2.7	0.8	1.1
Trade	2.0	2.1	2.1	2.1	2.0
Transport & Storage	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
Services	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.4	3.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Urban	1977/78	1983	1987/88	1993/94	1999/00
Males					
Agriculture	10.6	10.2	9.1	9.0	6.6
Mining & Quarrying	0.9	1.5	1.3	1.3	0.9
Manufacturing	27.5	27.3	25.9	23.6	22.4
Electricity, gas, etc.	1.1	1.2	1.2	1.2	0.8
Construction	4.2	5.1	5.9	6.9	8.7
Trade	21.6	20.1	21.7	21.9	29.4
Transport & Storage	9.8	10.2	9.6	9.7	10.4
Services	24.3	24.4	25.3	26.4	21.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Females					
Agriculture	32.0	28.7	30.5	24.7	17.7
Mining & Quarrying	0.5	0.8	0.7	0.6	0.4
Manufacturing	29.6	27.4	26.9	24.1	24.0
Electricity, gas, etc.	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.2
Construction	2.2	3.6	3.5	4.1	4.8
Trade	8.7	10.4	9.9	10.0	16.9
Transport & Storage	1.0	1.5	0.7	1.3	1.8
Services	25.9	27.4	27.6	34.9	34.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: National Sample Survey Organization. Results of 1977/78 Survey Round and National Sample Survey Organization. 2001. Table 6.7, pp. 75–76.

urban women, apart from agriculture, manufacturing and services were the other two industries of relative concentration.

In rural India, women formed little more than a third of workers employed in agriculture and manufacturing, while their share was a quarter in services in most of the years for which data are reported. In mining which includes quarrying too women formed almost a fifth of all workers. Decline in their share in construction and trade in 1999/2000 compared to that in 1977/78 could be construed as a positive change. Manual work in construction is strenuous and as noted earlier trade is regarded as the hotbed of underemployed.

Table 7
Gender Composition of Usually Employed (PS+SS) by Sectors, India, 1977/78-1999/2000

Rural	1977/78	1983	1987/88	1993/94	1999/00
Agriculture	38.4	39.9	39.1	39.3	38.7
Mining & Quarrying	18.6	22.7	24.4	24.1	20.9
Manufacturing	34.4	36.1	34.5	35.8	35.5
Electricity, gas, etc.	0.0	0.0	0.0	15.7	0.0
Construction	16.7	16.9	29.2	12.2	11.4
Trade	22.2	21.9	18.9	17.5	13.5
Transport & Storage	4.5	3.2	2.7	2.5	1.6
Services	24.4	21.9	21.5	21.0	24.3
Total	36.3	37.1	36.1	35.8	34.6
Urban	1977/78	1983	1987/88	1993/94	1999/00
Agriculture	44.7	42.3	47.2	42.3	39.7
Mining & Quarrying	12.9	12.2	12.6	10.9	9.8
Manufacturing	22.4	20.7	21.7	21.4	20.8
Electricity, gas, etc.	2.3	4.1	4.2	6.3	5.8
Construction	12.3	15.5	13.7	13.7	11.9
Trade	9.7	11.9	10.9	10.9	12.4
Transport & Storage	2.7	3.7	1.9	3.5	4.1
Services	22.2	22.6	22.6	26.1	28.6
Total	21.1	20.6	21.1	21.1	19.7

Source: Same as for Table 6.

Share of urban women among total workers in agriculture was the largest, but declined over years indicating probably that they could move to other sectors of the economy where jobs were betterpaid.[13] Entry of educated women made services more feminized over years. Share of women in manufacturing employment, which was expected to increase in the wake of liberalization[14] in fact declined, though marginally. Trade in all probability offered greater opportunity to the less educated women now than in the past while mining did not. Stability in the gender composition of workers by industry suggests probably that disadvantage women have while entering any industry, has not changed over years. They were probably not preferred but since they could not be rejected, were accepted by the labour market now as in the past.

Women and the Organized Sector

The D.G.E.&T under its EMI Programme gives data on women's employment in the organized sector. These data are collected under the Employment Exchange (Compulsory Notification of Vacancies) Act, 1959 and published every year. The Act requires all non-agricultural establishments in the public sector and those employing 25 or more workers in private sector to report vacancies and report employment by sex in their units. Non-agricultural private sector units employing 10–24 workers report the information on voluntary basis. The data are comprehensive and available for all industries at a disaggregated level. Some inherent limitations of the data mar comparisons based on the data over time. They are collected on voluntary basis from employers who are expected to file returns and send information to the D.G.E.& T. The authorities cannot compel employers to file returns. All units especially the medium and small units are not responsive and prompt in furnishing employment information. This has affected the coverage and the response rate has declined over time. More importantly, the informal sector units that employ less than 10 workers are outside the purview of the EMI Programme. So the data barely relate to 7 to 8 per cent of the total employment in India. Despite the limitations, as the organized sector is generally regarded as an employer of better educated men and women in the country it would be interesting to see how women fared in this sector.

Growing at 1.1 per cent per annum compound, total employment in the organized sector increased from 22.88m to 28.06m between 1981 and 2000. Employment of women within it grew much faster at 3.0 per cent per annum and increased from 2.79m. to 4.92m between 1981 and 2000. Women's share in total employment improved from 12.2 to 17.5 per cent. Public sector accounted for 68 per cent of the total organized employment in 1981. Its share was only marginally higher, 69 per cent in 2000. The total and female employment in the public sector grew at 1.3 and 3.4 per cent per annum compound respectively between 1981 and 2000, faster than that in the organized sector. The corresponding rates in the private sector were marginally lower, 1.1 and 3.0 per cent per annum. So women had done well for themselves in finding their way to the organized sector where employment is better paid and more secure.

Women's Employment by Industry in the Organized Sector

Table 8 shows that in all three years for which data are given, nearly half of all workers and more than three fourth of the women working in the public sector, were employed in services. Transport, manufacturing and construction were the other three industries, which together accounted for more than a third of the total public sector employees but 15 per cent of female employees in 1981. Finance improved its share in total and female employment changing the ranks in 2000 though services continued to dominate the public organized sector.

Table 8
Distribution of Total and Female Employement in the Public and Private Organized Sector by Industry, India, 1981, 1991 & 2000

Public Sector	1981		1991		2000	
Industry Division	Total	Females	Total	Females	Total	Females
Agriculture & Allied	3.0	2.5	2.9	2.2	2.6	1.7
Mining & Quarrying	5.3	4.2	5.2	2.6	4.8	2.0
Manufacturing 2 & 3	9.7	6.1	9.7	4.8	8.1	3.5
Electricity, Gas, etc.	4.4	1.1	4.7	1.3	5.0	1.5
Construction	7.0	3.3	6.0	2.4	5.7	2.2
Trade, Hotels & Rest.	0.8	0.4	0.8	0.6	0.8	0.6
Transport, Storage	17.5	5.3	15.9	5.8	15.9	6.0
Finance	4.8	4.5	6.3	6.3	6.7	6.3
Services	47.5	72.6	48.4	74.1	50.4	76.2
All Industries	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Private Sector	1981		1991		2000	
Industry Division	Total	Females	Total	Females	Total	Females
Agriculture & Allied	11.6	32.4	10.4	31.1	10.5	22.4
Mining & Quarrying	1.8	1.8	1.3	1.2	0.9	0.4
Manufacturing 2 & 3	61.5	39.0	58.4	33.8	58.8	45.2
Electricity, Gas, etc.	0.5	0.0	0.5	0.1	0.5	0.0
Construction	1.0	0.7	1.0	0.4	0.7	0.2
Trade, Hotels & Restaurants	3.7	1.1	3.9	1.5	3.8	1.4
Transport, Storage, etc.	0.8	0.2	0.7	0.2	0.8	0.3
Finance	2.7	1.0	3.3	1.9	4.1	2.6
Services	16.5	23.8	19.3	29.9	19.9	27.4
All Industries	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Government of India, 2002; Government of India, CSO, 2002.

Manufacturing industry was the most important industry that employed bulk of the workers in the private sector. It accounted for nearly 62 per cent of the total and 39 per cent of the women workers in 1981. In 2000, manufacturing's share in total employment declined marginally to 59 per cent but the share of women in it increased to 45 per cent. For all workers in the private sector and women among them, services and agriculture and allied were two industries next in importance and together employed 28 per cent of the total but 56 per cent of the women in 1981. These two together employed 30 per cent of all and 50 per cent of the female workers in 2000.

Table 9 tells us that both the public and the private sectors employed a higher share of women workers and hence were more feminized in 2000 than in 1981. Relative to women's share of 9.7 per cent in total employment in the public sector, only services reported a higher share of women in it in 1981. In 2000 on the other hand, barring services, finance came very close to the share of women of 14.7 per cent in total employment. In the private sector in 1981 three industries; agriculture and allied, services and mining and quarrying employed higher than their share of 17.5 per cent for all industries taken together. By 2000, women's share in the total private sector employment increased to 23.9 per cent, only agriculture and allied and services had higher share of female employment in them compared to the average of 23.9 per cent.

Table 9
Share of Women in Organized Sector Employment by Industry & Sector, India, 1981-2000

	1981		1991		2000	
Industry Division	Public	Private	Public	Private	Public	Private
Agriculture & Allied	8.0	48.8	9.2	55.7	9.4	51.1
Mining & Quarrying	7.8	18.3	6.2	16.5	6.2	11.0
Manufacturing 2 & 3	6.1	11.1	6.1	10.8	6.3	18.4
Electricity, Gas, etc.	2.4	1.4	3.4	2.0	4.5	2.2
Construction	4.6	13.2	4.8	8.2	5.8	7.0
Trade	5.2	5.2	8.8	7.0	10.2	8.9
Transport/Storage	2.9	4.5	4.5	6.0	5.5	9.7
Finance	8.9	6.6	12.3	10.8	14.0	15.1
Services	14.8	25.2	18.8	28.8	22.2	32.9
All Industries	9.7	17.5	12.3	18.7	14.7	23.9

Source: Government of India, 2002; Government of India, CSO, 2002.

Table 10 shows that nearly 90 per cent of the women employed in agriculture and allied industries in the organized sector were in its private sector. Share of private sector was equally overwhelming in manufacturing where 85 per cent of the women in 1981 and 90 per cent of them in 2000 were employed. Trade, hotels and restaurants, was another important industry for women in the private sector. Barring these three industries, in others, public sector employed majority of the women working in the organized sector. Share of women in the public sector was almost over 97 per cent in electricity and gas generation and transport and over 77 per cent in all other industries except agriculture and allied, manufacturing and trade.

Table 10
Share of Women Employed in the Private Sector in Total Female Employment in the Organized Sector, India, 1981, 1991 & 2000

Industry division	Per cent shares 1981	1991	2000
Agriculture & Allied	91.9	89.7	90.6
Mining & Quarrying	27.3	21.0	13.4
Manufacturing 2 & 3	84.7	81.2	90.4
Electricity, Gas, etc.	2.9	2.6	2.0
Construction	16.0	9.8	5.9
Trade, Hotels & Restaurants	70.2	61.5	63.9
Transport, Storage, etc.	3.3	2.3	3.8
Finance	16.2	15.7	22.9
Services	22.0	19.8	20.6
All Industries	46.3	37.9	42.0

Source: Government of India, 2002; Government of India, CSO, 2002.

These data show that women improved their share of employment in most of the industries both in public and private organized sectors between 1981 and 2000. Their share in public sector increased in all industries except mining and quarrying in 2000. In the private sector on the other hand mining and quarrying and electricity gas etc. employed lower share of women than they did in 1981. Many explanations could be offered for this improvement. Apart from the higher participation of educated women in the labour market this could be the consequence of a deliberate state policy that encouraged employment of women, especially in the public sector. But in the private sector employers probably preferred cheap female than dear male labour, due to feminization of economic activity, a process that was expected in the era of liberalization.[15]

Women in Manufacturing Industries

Annual Survey of Industries (ASI) conducted by Central Statistical Organization (CSO) gives valuable data relating to factories in India. For the purpose of the Survey, factory is defined as an establishment that employs 10 or more workers and uses power or employs 20 or more workers but does not use power. ASI does not directly report employment in the factories; it reports the man-days of 8-hour duration worked by all employees and manual workers among them. The total man-days worked are further divided into those put in by men, women and children employed directly and those others put in by workers employed through contractors. By dividing the total man-days worked in a year by the number of days the factory worked during a year we get the average number of workers employed in that factory during any particular year. ASI is an important source that covers all manufacturing industries. However data relating to man-days worked by men, women and children employed directly are not published yearly but are available only for specific years.

We had access to data relating to 1995/96. With these we identified manufacturing industries where female labour is commonly used. Table 11 shows that in 1995/96, 11.5 per cent of the workers directly employed by manufacturing units in India were women. Child labour was negligible in all the industries. Share of women directly employed was the highest 50.1 per cent in Manufacture of Beverages and Tobacco (22), which includes manufacture of bidis. Share of women in this industry in fact marginally exceeded that

Table 11
Distribution of Workers Directly Employed in Manufacturing Industries by Sex India, 1995/96

Industry Division & Code	Percentage Share of Directly Employed			Directly Employed as % of	
	Men	Women	Children	Total	Workers
20 Food Products	93.3	6.7	0.0	100.0	82.8
21 Food Products	66.6	33.1	0.3	100.0	93.7
22 Beverages, Tobacco & related	48.2	51.8	0.0	100.0	50.8
23 Cotton Textiles	91.3	8.7	0.0	100.0	94.9
24 Wool, Silk & Syethetics Textiles	96.6	3.4	0.0	100.0	87.7
25 Jute/Veg.Fibre Textiles	98.2	1.7	0.0	100.0	99.7
26 Textile Products	61.9	38.0	0.0	100.0	96.2
27 Wood & Wood Products	94.0	6.0	0.0	100.0	89.7
28 Paper & Paper Products	96.0	3.9	0.1	100.0	89.8
29 Leather & Leather Products	66.6	33.4	0.0	100.0	93.4
30 Basic Chemicals & Products	85.2	14.7	0.1	100.0	88.1
31 Rubber, Plastic, Petroleum, Coal	96.2	3.8	0.0	100.0	90.7
32 Non-metallic Mineral Products	88.3	11.7	0.0	100.0	72.9
33 Basic Metals & Alloys	98.7	1.3	0.0	100.0	81.4
34 Metal Products except Machinery	98.3	1.6	0.0	100.0	91.0
35 Machinery except Transport	99.1	0.9	0.0	100.0	91.1
36 Electrical & Industrial Machinery	90.0	10.0	0.0	100.0	93.1
37 Transport Equipment & Parts	98.8	1.2	0.0	100.0	95.4
38 Other Manufacturing Industries	84.1	15.9	0.0	100.0	95.3
39 Repair of Capital Goods	99.1	0.8	0.1	100.0	99.4
All Manufacturing Industries	88.4	11.5	0.0	100.0	88.2

Note: Industry Group 20 consists of preparation & preservation of meat, manufacture of dairy products Preservation & processing of fruit & vegetables, of fish, garin milling, sugar & related products Common salt, bakery products & cocoa products and confectionery. Industry Group 21 consists of manufacture of hydrogenated oils, vegetable oils, processing of tea, coffee edible nuts, ice, animal feed, starch etc.

Source: Government of India, CSO, Annual Survey of Industries, 1995/1996.

of men. Employers generally get most of the bidi rolling work done through home-based workers under the putting out system. So the share of contract labour was also likely to be high. Apart from Beverages, Food Products (21), Textile products (26), Leather & leather products (29), Chemicals (30), Non-metallic minerals (32) and Other Manufacturing industries (38) were other industries that reported employing higher than the average share of women in manufacturing industries. Going by our experience in Bombay where we had found that manufacturing firms used female and contract labour as substitutes,[16] we expected that the practice of getting work done through contractors was likely to prevail much more in these industries than others. Our expectation was borne out only in the case of Beverages (22) and Non-metallic minerals (32) but not in the case of others. In the absence of data relating to another year either before or after 1995/96, it is difficult to say how the pattern of employment of women in factories might have changed. If we were to go by the experience of the private organized sector in manufacturing we could expect that industries that employed a higher than average share of women are likely to employ more women with flexibilization of the labour market over the 1990s. In the absence of data relating to a later year, it is difficult to substantiate the statement.

With whatever data we had access to relating to employment status and industrial distribution of men and women we tried to understand if the labour market outcomes for them were different. Changes in the employment status distribution suggest that labour market has not been particularly harsh to women in general but to urban women among them in particular. It is difficult to say how women fared relative to men in the industrial sector. Industrial distribution of rural women had hardly changed may be because rural non-farm sector had failed to offer them suitable jobs. For rural men and urban men and women trade and construction were emerging as important sectors of employment. Possibly the sectors could absorb the less educated labour that entered the labour market. But this could also be a consequence of inability of both men and women to find alternative wage employment elsewhere in the economy. Gender composition by industry remained stable over the 1980s and the 1990s. Turning to the better-paid organized sector which offers employment to the relatively more educated men and women we found that women had done well for themselves in this sector. ASI data we have are too scanty as they relate only to one year. But they show that in some manufacturing industries employers prefer women workers. Beverages and Tobacco manufacturing is a typical industry where majority of workers were women and possibly substantial work was being done through contractors who got it done through home based workers. Flexibilization of the labour market could have strengthened these forces in other industries too. In conclusion we could say that this overview of employment structure of women suggests that they did not face the inequality which is generally associated with gender. We hasten to add that this was not really true. Empirical evidence we proceed to give in Section III rather shows that women faced inequalities based on gender in the labour market.

III. GENDER-BASED DISCRIMINATION IN THE LABOUR MARKET

Gender-based inequalities are universal and enduring. Women receive unequal treatment in many walks of life because they are women. We noted earlier that work at home is unequally divided between men and women, so is the responsibility of infant and child-care and care of the aged, sick and the disabled. Women are denied access to education and information. In a male dominated society like ours social and cultural attitudes and values restrict freedom that women can hope to enjoy. Unfortunately these attitudes have not changed over time. Recent evidence of declining sex ratio in the population of age group 0–6 in the 2001 Census and increasing incidence of violence and crimes against women rather suggest that social obstacles in women's empowerment have increased.[17] Women in India thus are victims of the worst kind of social and cultural discrimination but in this section we have restricted ourselves to economic discrimination they face in the labour market.

Economic discrimination is the most obvious and visible kind of discrimination, evidence of which can be given with data supporting its existence. Discrimination based on gender predates capitalism and though socialist economies succeeded in reducing it, they too could not eliminate it altogether. This kind of discrimination amounts to an unequal treatment of equals in the labour market. It is difficult to say whether labour market discrimination is a cause or a consequence of the discrimination that women face within the family. Views differ but it is true that gender-based discrimination is an outcome of complex, social, cultural processes including relations between men and women in any society.

Economists attribute gender-based discrimination to the low productivity of women relative to men. But explanation is not only simplistic but far too inadequate. It is claimed that women are overcrowded in low-paid occupations because of their low productivity. This low productivity is said to be the consequence of low investment in human capital. Why they invest less in human capital relative to men? Answer is the sexual division of labour. The role society assigns to women is of housekeepers while men are supposed to be breadwinners. Because of this role women are said to be less committed than men to the labour market and therefore invest less in human capital. The explanations thus are circular and therefore inadequate.[18]

Gender-based discrimination which women experience in India after they enter the labour market is of three types. Women face employment discrimination, because of certain myths that prevail among employers regarding women's commitment to work outside their own homes. Their inability to have access either to education or to skills and even to job information often forces them to accept work which is similar to work that they do at home. This results in occupational segregation that restricts women to low-paid and low-productivity occupations. That equals are treated unequally is crystal clear in wage discrimination that prevails, both in rural and urban sectors of the Indian economy.

Employment Discrimination

Women in India are victims of employment discrimination because employers prefer to employ men rather than women as employees. Data from the Censuses and the NSSO survey rounds revealed that women's participation in economic activity was always lower than that of men. But this preference is reflected in the data on unemployment rates given in Tables 12 and 13. We have noted elsewhere while comparing WPRs by principal status with those of principal and subsidiary status taken together that inclusion of subsidiary workers increases participation rates but lowers unemployment rates based on usual status.[19] As noted earlier this is the result of the NSSO's principle of assigning status based on major time spent in the activity.

Table 12 shows that urban women were subjected to employment discrimination much more than their rural sisters. In four of the five years for which data are reported in the table, women suffered from higher rates of unemployment relative to men. Unemployment rates of rural women were, higher than those of rural men in only two of these five years. This was likely to be a consequence of higher incidence of subsidiary work mainly in agriculture among rural than urban women. Rural women were therefore less likely to look actively for work and report themselves as unemployed.

Table 12
Unemployment Rates by Usual Status (P+S) by Sex and Rural-Urban Residence India, 1977/78-1999/2000

Year	Rural		Urban		Total	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
1977/78	1.3	2.0	5.4	12.4	2.2	3.3
1983	1.4	0.7	5.1	4.9	2.3	1.2
1987/88	1.8	2.4	5.2	6.2	2.6	2.9
1993/94	1.4	0.8	4.0	6.2	2.1	1.6
1999/00	1.7	1.0	4.5	5.7	2.5	1.8

Source: National Sample Survey Organization, 1997. Table 7.2, p. 124.
National Sample Survey Organization, 2001. Table 7.1, p. 129.

Table 13 gives unemployment rates reported for men and women by current weekly and current daily status. We have given these data mainly because employment discrimination is not reflected in the data given in Table 12 because we consider principal status and subsidiary workers together. Table 13 shows that this was true of unemployment rates by current weekly status too. But the most comprehensive measure of unemployment measured by current daily status given in the same table shows that women, both rural and urban, were victims of employment discrimination. Irrespective of status and place of residence unemployment rates for women were lower in 1999/2000 than in 1977/78, indicating probably that there was greater acceptance of women as workers now than in the past.

Table 13

Unemployment Rates by Current Weekly Status & Current Daily Status by Sex And Rural-Urban Residence, India, 1977/78 – 1999/2000

Year	Current Weekly Status				Current Daily Status			
	Rural		Urban		Rural		Urban	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
1977/78	3.6	4.1	7.1	10.9	7.1	9.2	9.4	14.5
1983	3.7	4.3	6.7	7.5	7.5	9.0	9.2	11.0
1987/88	4.2	4.4	6.6	9.2	4.6	6.7	8.8	12.0
1993/94	3.1	2.9	5.2	7.9	5.6	5.6	6.7	10.4
1999/00	3.9	3.7	5.6	7.3	7.2	7.0	7.3	9.4

Source: National Sample Survey Organization, 2001. Table 7.2, p. 130.

Looking more closely at the data on unemployment, we find that like men unemployed women were concentrated in labour force entry ages, and faced marginally higher rates of unemployment too. But education specific unemployment rates revealed that women were subjected to higher rates of unemployment than equally educated men. The phenomenon could be attributed to supply factor too where because of the spread of education probably more educated women were entering the labour market in search of jobs but were discriminated against on the basis of gender.[20]

Occupational Segregation

Due to sex-labeling of certain occupations as women's occupations, women are found overcrowded in a few occupations such as, nursing, teaching, clerical and service occupations. This kind of occupational segregation is relevant much more in urban than rural labour market. We noted earlier that bulk of the rural women were employed in agriculture, non-farm occupations were not major employers for them.

Analysis of data of the NSSO data had revealed that in 1983, relative to their share in the total workforce, urban women were concentrated in professional & technical occupations mostly as nurses and teachers, in service occupations as maids, cooks and domestics and in farming. In 1993/94 this concentration increased substantially in production and related occupations but declined sharply in all others except clerical and sales occupations. Similar exercise for 1999/2000 shows that with increasing employment of women female occupational structure was much more diversified now than in the past. But service occupations and production process occupations continued to have higher than average share of women in the urban workforce. The analysis confirms that experience of women even in the urban labour market ran parallel to their subordination within their household. Just as the tyranny of the household subjected women to time-consuming and repetitive household chores, so did the labour market confine them to jobs that were at the lowest end of the occupational ladder.

Further, their share of employment in nursing, teaching, clerical and service occupations taken together increased from 30.8 per cent in 1983 to 35 per cent in 1999/00. It was heartening to see that the share of service workers remained constant at 14 per cent while that of teachers and clerks improved respectively from about 4 per cent to 11 per cent and 5 per cent to 7 per cent between 1983 and 1999/00. More importantly, all these so called women's occupations continued to offer employment to women, which resulted in an improvement in the share of women employed in these occupations. Occupational segregation probably increased but not necessarily in the lowest paid occupations but in those that were higher up in the occupational ladder.

Occupational segregation is said to be the consequence of limited access women have to labour market information. Not only is their number in the labour market small but most of them are found in low-paid occupations. More often than not women working in the same occupation were their informants in the labour market.[41] This perpetuated their segmentation. Given the burden of housework they had very little time to socialize. A large bulk of even urban women workers had very little education. Being uneducated they could never hope to read newspapers or approach employment exchanges. As against this, educated women could access these secondary sources of information.

Gender-based Wage Discrimination by Industry

Wage discrimination women experience in the labour market is most visible in the data available from the NSSO. They clearly show that a woman as educated as a man, was paid on an average a wage lower than that paid to a man across industry and occupation, in rural and urban India. Women working as casual workers too were subjected to wage discrimination but these data were not cross-classified at educational level. So the following analysis is restricted to regular wage/salaried workers in ages 15–59 who worked in rural and urban India. Moreover, the data relate to workers in the non-farm sector of the Indian economy excluding agricultural wage labourers.

In Table 14 we report gender-based wage differentials of regular wage and salaried workers in rural India for 1987/88, 1993/94 and 1999/2000. Differential higher than 100 indicates that woman earned more than an equally educated man in that industry. This may happen if a woman belonged to white-collar occupation while the man did manual work in the same industry. Alternatively this could happen where entries in the cell were too few to yield a credible average. As against 71.5 per cent of the male wage in 1987/88, a regular wage/salaried woman in rural India in 1993/94 received 59.7 per cent of the male wage. In 1999/2000 on the other hand the differential had narrowed substantially to 89.6 per cent. Irrespective of the year wage differential by gender was wider among the less than the more educated. We expect education to reduce wage differentials based on gender. It did but not beyond the secondary level of education. So women graduates were not the least discriminated against. Wage differentials widened between 1987/88 and 1993/94 but narrowed in the next six years mainly because of the proverbial increase in the wages reported in services in 1999/2000 for women who were literate and studied up to the primary level. It is possible that women workers included for this calculation could be government employees who were beneficiaries of the Fifth Pay Commission who had substantial increase in their salaries.

Wage differentials not adjusted for education, reported in the last column of the table show that they were the widest in Manufacturing 15-22 in all the years. In 1987/88 women received 41.1 per cent of the average wage paid to men. In 1993/94 the differential narrowed to 43.1 per cent but widened again to 39.2 per cent by 1999/2000. This is not surprising as this industry group includes traditional industries like food products, beverages, textiles, textile products, leather, wood and paper. The nature of work in all these industries except the last two, is similar to the work women do at home. This probably provided ease of entry to rural women who moved out of agriculture. But entry of many women may have further lowered their wages that were already low. Women earned more than men in electricity and gas and construction in two of the three years, while they did so in transport in one. As explained earlier, the phenomenon could be purely statistical than real. When we compare gender-based wage differentials between 1987/88 and 1999/2000, we find that they narrowed in only 2 but widened in the other 8 industries.

Similar conclusions emerge from Table 15, which reports the gender-based wage differentials in urban India. Gender-based wage differential was 83 per cent in 1987/88. It widened to 72 per cent in 1993/94 but was back again to its initial level in 1999/2000. As in rural India so also in urban India education narrowed gender-based wage differentials but only up to the level of undergraduates. And yet, graduate women faced marginally lower degree of wage discrimination based on gender in urban than in rural India. When we compare the wage differentials by education given in the last row in 1987/88 with those in 1999/2000, we find that gender-based wage differential did not change for the least educated, while those for other educational levels had narrowed though marginally.

Comparing the data in the last column, unadjusted for education in 1987/88, we find that as in rural so also in urban wage differential was the widest in manufacturing 2 where women were paid 43.8 per cent of the men's average wage. This differential narrowed in the 1993/94 and 1999/2000 to 53 per cent. In 1999/2000 however women working in agriculture and allied industry were the most discriminated and earned barely 42 per cent of the average wage paid to men. Compared to 1987/88 wage differentials based on gender widened in 5 while narrowed in five industries.

Gender-based Wage Discrimination by Occupation

With whatever data the NSSO could provide, in Table 16 we have presented gender-based wage differentials in five occupational groups holding education constant in two years 1987/88 and 1999/2000 in rural India. As noted earlier these occupations are identified as "women's occupations" where work, women do is an extension of the work they do at home. Not standardized for education in 1987/88, rural women in housekeeping were the most while those in clerical occupations, the least discriminated against in terms of wages. By 1999/2000, extent of wage discrimination increased in all these occupations. But nurses were the least while spinners and weavers the most discriminated against in terms of wages.

Irrespective of level of education, women working as nurses, teachers and clerks were paid a lower wage relative to men in 1999/2000 compared to what they were paid

Table 14

Gender-based Wage Differentials of Regular Wage/Salaried Employees, 15-59, By Industry and Education, Rural India, 1987/88, 1993/94 and 1999/2000

Female Wage as % of Male Wage

	Educational Level				
1987/88 Industry Division	Not Lit.	Lit. upto Middle	Secondary & HSC.	Graduate & above	All Levels
Agriculture & Allied	80.2	85.5	88.7	100.3	73.0
Mining & Quarrying	81.3	40.5	0.0	0.0	61.5
Manufacturing 15-22	46.2	49.9	87.0	70.3	41.4
Manufacturing 23-37	46.1	46.7	133.7	0.0	48.0
Electricity, Gas, etc.	0.0	119.4	128.3	91.6	124.9
Construction	61.5	0.0	101.8	47.6	57.9
Trade, Hotels & Restaurants	63.6	94.0	108.2	93.8	102.4
Transport, Storage, etc.	43.7	48.5	84.6	135.2	83.5
Finance	155.0	54.8	49.9	81.3	83.8
Services	47.7	68.0	86.7	87.1	73.7
All Industries	65.0	68.3	89.1	87.5	71.5
1993/94					
Agriculture & Allied	97.2	95.7	69.5	84.1	83.1
Mining & Quarrying	62.3	27.4	43.2	0.0	54.3
Manufacturing 15-22	53.4	47.6	49.9	0.0	43.1
Manufacturing 23-37	50.1	36.6	97.0	46.8	58.3
Electricity, Gas, etc.	73.6	1.2	86.8	0.0	80.5
Construction	60.3	111.8	123.9	94.9	109.8
Trade, Hotels & Restaurants	65.8	117.1	97.4	124.4	97.0
Transport, Storage, etc.	0.0	64.7	99.9	0.0	78.7
Finance	13.6	75.7	66.3	86.4	71.8
Services	37.3	52.3	76.8	73.3	59.2
All Industries	57.5	52.1	79.7	73.9	59.7
1999/2000					
Agriculture & Allied	87.7	72.0	98.8	65.2	70.3
Mining & Quarrying	34.7	28.8	29.5	110.2	31.4
Manufacturing 15-22	40.3	47.7	42.1	0.0	39.2
Manufacturing 23-37	49.0	58.1	105.6	75.2	50.1
Electricity, Gas, etc.	94.1	28.3	103.0	0.0	111.5
Construction	66.4	107.2	170.1	0.0	105.5
Trade, Hotels & Restaurants	173.7	61.9	55.0	44.8	92.0
Transport, Storage, etc.	115.3	57.2	68.6	61.2	81.6
Finance	119.0	35.9	65.2	52.3	57.6
Services	38.9	271.9	74.2	71.5	96.7
All Industries	56.6	176.2	85.1	72.4	89.6

Source: NSSO, 1990. Table 79, pp. S-342, S-343. NSSO, 1997. Table 55, pp A307 & A308. NSSO.2001. Table 67, pp. A 280.

Table 15

Gender-based Wage Differentials of Regular Wage/Salaried Employees, 15-59, By Industry and Education, Urban India, 1987/88, 1993/94 and 1999/2000

Female Wage as % of Male Wage

	Educational Level				
1987/88 Industry Division	Not Lit.	Lit. upto Middle	Secondary & HSC	Graduate &above	All Levels
Agriculture & Allied	79.1	73.3	97.7	105.1	69.6
Mining & Quarrying	69.9	83.8	132.7	74.3	68.1
Manufacturing 15-22	43.9	43.8	66.5	78.4	43.8
Manufacturing 23-37	64.8	68.3	81.5	77.4	76.2
Electricity, Gas, etc.	94.2	71.4	79.5	77.2	87.6
Construction	52.4	60.2	44.1	73.6	70.5
Trade, Hotels & Restaurants	43.4	86.9	82.3	113.5	81.5
Transport, Storage, etc.	115.9	104.3	87.5	94.9	115.4
Finance	103.2	171.0	64.9	77.4	86.8
Services	57.2	66.8	82.8	82.0	78.1
All Industries	59.0	67.1	83.9	81.6	83.0
1993/94					
Agriculture & Allied	92.0	89.4	114.2	92.9	90.8
Mining & Quarrying	77.1	22.8	82.3	67.8	67.8
Manufacturing 15-22	46.6	51.5	54.7	88.5	53.0
Manufacturing 23-37	68.3	50.3	70.6	78.6	73.8
Electricity, Gas, etc.	44.2	0.0	79.5	86.9	89.3
Construction	46.0	59.7	106.9	47.7	54.1
Trade, Hotels & Restaurants	59.3	87.1	89.0	85.7	99.5
Transport, Storage, etc.	117.0	75.1	94.9	84.5	103.7
Finance	48.2	60.0	74.5	80.5	84.3
Services	56.6	54.8	88.2	76.1	72.0
All Industries	57.8	56.8	88.3	77.2	79.8
1999/2000					
Agriculture & Allied	108.4	64.9	52.9	22.7	41.9
Mining & Quarrying	73.5	41.3	26.8	85.6	58.1
Manufacturing 15-22	47.7	50.7	55.1	114.8	53.3
Manufacturing 23-37	92.0	67.5	66.9	81.0	74.2
Electricity, Gas, etc.	85.9	70.0	89.8	93.0	85.2
Construction	52.6	78.3	72.5	123.5	105.0
Trade, Hotels & Restaurants	78.2	84.5	104.8	127.8	132.5
Transport, Storage, etc.	120.8	77.2	104.1	101.4	119.3
Finance	65.4	70.7	104.2	97.8	103.9
Services	63.4	67.6	79.4	74.6	77.2
All Industries	59.2	61.3	86.7	83.4	82.7

Source: NSSO, 1990. Table 79, pp. S-342, S-343. NSSO, 1997. Table 55, pp. A307 & A308. NSSO.2001. Table 67, pp. A 280.

in 1987/88. Opposite was the case with women in housekeeping. Scarcity of women willing to take to this profession along with growth of rural industrial units needing menial services like cleaning and sweeping and of hotel industry on the other may have been responsible for this increase in women's wages in housekeeping. The same explanation may hold true for spinners and weavers too.

Table 16

Gender-based Wage Differentials of Regular Wage/Salaried Employees Aged 15-59 in Selected Occupational Groups by Education, Rural India 1987–88, 1993-94 & 1999/2000

Female Wage as % of Male Wage

Occupational Group	Educational Level				
	Not Lit.	Lit. upto	Secondary middle	Graduate & HSC	All Levels & Above
1987-88					
Nursing	29.0	87.8	93.5	102.7	88.3
Teachers	45.5	56.8	91.9	93.8	78.8
Clerical	82.9	79.4	89.2	91.4	92.3
Housekeepers etc.	51.9	41.5	48.8	N.A.	38.5
Spinners/Weavers	50.2	65.9	64.0	N.A.	54.6
All Occupations	65.0	68.3	89.1	87.5	71.5
1993-94					
Nursing	286.2	78.3	76.4	73.6	71.8
Teachers	11.2	44.9	71.7	74.4	65.4
Clerical	61.5	73.7	87.0	80.2	80.0
Housekeepers etc.	38.0	33.7	49.4	74.3	32.3
Spinners/Weavers	43.2	47.9	74.9	44.8	41.9
All Occupations	57.5	52.1	79.7	77.8	59.7
1999/2000					
Nursing	61.8	55.5	83.5	75.4	78.4
Teachers	19.9	35.8	67.3	78.9	65.0
Clerical	39.9	60.9	75.9	59.4	62.7
Housekeeping etc.	73.6	70.9	107.8	317.1	68.3
Spinners/Weavers	62.2	49.2	66.1	N.A.	53.6
All Occupations	56.6	176.2	85.1	72.4	89.5

Note: Only five Occupational groups in which the share of females exceeded 2 per cent of the total female workers in 1987–88 were considered since wage data for these occupation groups were available for both 1987–88 and 1993–94.

Source: NSSO, 1990. Table 80R, pp. S-345-S346; NSSO, 1997. Table 56R, pp. A 312-A313; NSSO. 2001. Table 68.p. A286–A287.

Table 17 relates to gender-based occupational wage differentials in urban India. Without standardizing for education, in 1987/88, women in nursing were the least while those in spinning and weaving the most discriminated against in terms of wages. This was not so in 1999/2000, when spinners and weavers received almost 124 per cent of the wage paid to men. Absence of entries in two of the four cells considered for calculating the average suggests that this stray result could result because of very few entries used for calculating the average wage. Gender-based wage differentials narrowed in all except one occupation. Teachers were the most discriminated against in terms of wages in 1999/2000.

Table 17

Gender-based Wage Differentials of Regular Wage/Salaried Employees Aged 15-59 in Selected Occupational Groups by Education, Urban India 1987-88, 1993-94 & 1999/2000

Female Wage as % of Male Wage

	Educational Level				
Occupational Group	Not Lit.	Lit. upto middle	Secondary & HSC	Graduate & Above	All Levels
1987-88					
Teachers	96.9	73.8	77.4	81.3	78.0
Clerical	67.8	92.7	90.5	92.2	90.6
Housekeepers, etc.	61.9	62.2	94.7	82.1	63.1
Spinners/Weavers	48.6	52.2	61.1	79.4	49.7
All Occupations	59.0	67.1	83.9	81.6	83.0
1993-94					
Nursing	77.7	82.0	108.3	85.5	91.1
Teachers	151.2	37.1	82.7	71.4	69.4
Clerical	91.9	78.9	88.9	87.4	89.6
Housekeepers, etc.	60.3	79.6	63.6	87.5	46.3
Spinners/Weavers	51.9	68.0	111.5	133.9	60.4
All Occupations	57.8	56.8	88.3	77.2	79.8
1999/2000					
Nursing	137.8	109.6	110.1	101.5	105.1
Teachers	99.2	51.1	69.1	78.5	73.4
Clerical	93.6	80.9	91.9	93.4	96.3
Housekeepers, etc.	59.2	86.6	52.6	78.4	83.1
Spinners/Weavers	NA	36.3	133.3	NA	124.5
All Occupations	59.1	61.3	86.7	83.4	82.6

Note: Only five Occupational groups in which the share of females exceeded 2 per cent of the total female workers in 1987–88 were considered since wage data for these occupation groups were available for both 1987–88 and 1993–94.

Source NSSO, 1990. Table 80U, pp. S-348-S349, NSSO, 1997 Table 56R, pp. A314–A315, NSSO. 2001. Table 68, pp. A289–A290.

Holding education constant women nurses and clerks could get a higher wage than men in the same occupation in 1999/2000 than in 1987/88. But teachers, barring those who were not literate, women of all other educational levels faced higher level of wage discrimination. This was true for women in housekeeping too, where only those who were literate and studied up to primary could get a higher wage compared to men in 1999/2000 than they did in 1987/88.

Human Capital Discrimination

Discrimination in employment, in terms of occupational segregation and wages in the labour market is often attributed to pre-entry discrimination against women in access to education. In the country as a whole nearly 70 per cent of the women while 43 per cent of the men, 7 years and over were illiterate in 1981. Literacy levels improved especially in the 1990s. As a result the shares of illiterate women and men, 7 years and over were much lower, 46 per cent and 24 per cent in 2001. For the first time since independence there was a decline in the absolute number of illiterates between 1991 and 2001. This indeed was a significant milestone in the field of literacy and one cannot but agree with the Registrar General of India when he calls 1991–2001, the "literacy decade". But it is sad to see that despite the efforts made by the government to promote literacy a little less than half of the women 7 years and older were illiterate.

In Table 18 we give school attendance ratios in rural and urban India in ages 5–9, 10–14 and 15–19 by sex in 1987/88, 1993/94 and 1999/2000. Irrespective of location and the year proportionately fewer girls than boys in all these age groups reported attending school. Index of inequality given in the same table assures us that over years proportionately fewer girls were denied access to education. This was so much more in urban than rural India. But the fact that nearly 40 per cent of the girls in rural India while only 11 per cent in urban India aged 15–19, were denied access to tertiary education beyond secondary in 1999/2000 shows that pre-entry human capital discrimination was much more severe among rural than urban dwellers. This had important implications if at all these girls were to enter the labour market. Rural girls were likely to be trapped in low-paid, insecure and intermittent jobs while their urban sisters could hope to get into better paid, secure jobs of a permanent nature.

NSSO's latest survey gives reasons given by children currently not attending school in 1999/2000. Some of these children had never attended any school, some attended it but discontinued after completing a particular level of education while some had dropped out of the school system without completing the course they were enrolled for. The main objective here was to find out if they were currently out of school because they were working to help their households financially. Reasons given were two: either that they did not attend school since they had to work to supplement household income or any other. Table 19 gives the share of children among all children, who were not attending school, because they had to work to supplement household income. It shows

Table 18

School or College Attendance/Enrollment Rates (%) by Sex and Rural-Urban Residence, India, 1987–88, 1993–94 & 1999/2000

Age	Rural			Urban		
	Males	Females	Index of Inequality	Males	Females	Index of Inequality
5-9						
1987-88	52.5	40.4	0.77	73.0	67.9	0.93
1993-94	66.5	56.0	0.84	83.7	79.7	0.95
1999/00	70.0	62.6	0.89	82.5	80.2	0.97
10-14						
1987-88	66.1	41.9	0.63	79.9	65.6	0.82
1993-94	76.0	55.8	0.73	86.8	81.6	0.94
1999/00	78.1	65.1	0.83	86.4	81.4	0.94
15-19						
1987-88	36.6	13.2	0.36	52.9	39.5	0.75
1993-94	41.3	20.8	0.50	56.9	49.7	0.87
1999/00	43.7	26.8	0.61	58.1	51.9	0.89

Note: Index of Inequality = (% Females Enrolled / Males Enrolled) x 100

Source: NSSO. 1990. Table 35, pp. S100-S104; NSSO. 1997. Table 27, pp. A79–A84; NSSO. 2001. Table 39, pp. A114–A118.

that irrespective of age, boys much more than girls were likely to be sent for work, both in rural and urban India. Poverty forced nearly a third of the boys aged 10–14 and nearly half of them in ages 15–19 not to attend school in both the locations. Lower share of girls who worked to supplement household income could be either because the labour market rejected young girls who were uneducated and lacked skills. But this could also be an outcome of their being forced to do household chores, which could permit adult women in the household to take up some work outside their homes. Unfortunately, tabulations given by the NSSO do not permit us to verify these statements.

National Family Health Survey (NHFS-2) furnishes some interesting data on reasons given by girls and boys who had never attended school and by those who were currently not attending school in 1998/99, the year of the survey. The most important reason for never attending school given by both boys and girls was that costs of education were high. For 24 per cent of the girls and 26 per cent of the boys in rural while 30 per cent of the girls and 29 per cent of the boys in urban India, this was the main reason for never attending school. Nearly 16 per cent of the girls while 26 per cent of the boys, rural and urban, said that they were not interested in studies. Another 16 per cent of the rural and 10 per cent of the urban girls could never make it to school because they were required for housework. The corresponding shares among boys were low, 7 per

Table 19
Share of Children Currently not Attending as They Worked to Supplement Household Income by Sex and Rural-Urban Residence, India, 1999/2000

Age	Rural		Urban	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
5-9	8.7	9.3	6.5	6.0
10-14	29.3	15.3	28.9	13.7
15-19	47.3	18.6	47.3	14.1

Source: National Sample Survey Organization, 2001. Table 43, pp. A125–A129.

cent and 5 per cent respectively. That girls were victims of social discrimination is clear from the fact that 13 per cent of the girls in the two locations reported that they never went to school because education was not considered necessary for them, obviously by their parents. Only 8 per cent of the rural and 6 per cent of the boys in urban India gave this reason for never attending school.

Reasons given for currently not attending school by girls were basically the same though the ranking changed. Girls and boys, rural and urban, gave not being interested in studies as the most important reason for currently not attending school. Nearly 25 per cent of the rural and 30 per cent of the urban girls gave this as the most important reason for their non-attendance. The respective shares among boys were higher, 40 and 43 per cent, respectively. This has important implications for changing the content of education to make it not only more interesting but also more relevant for children. About 17 per cent of the girls and 9 per cent of the boys in rural India did not attend school currently because they were required to do housework. Their shares in urban area were marginally lower, 15 per cent and 5 per cent respectively. Cost of education emerged as the third important reason for non-attendance. In rural areas, 11 per cent of the girls and 13 per cent of the boys said that they were currently out of school because education was costly. The respective shares of such children were higher 17 per cent and 15 per cent in urban areas. Interestingly enough, taking care of siblings did not emerge as an important reason either for never going to school or for current non-attendance.[29]

These data show clearly why girls are forced to leave schools and are often found doing housework. Poverty definitely was one of the major causes that deprived both girls and boys of schooling. But unlike boys, girls had to shoulder the burden of housework right from childhood; so the subordination within the household started for them at a tender age. In addition because of the general apathy towards education of girls they were victims of social discrimination too. Denial of equal access to education confined them to low-paid jobs in the informal sector at best or to the tyranny of household chores at worst.

Evidence of Social Discrimination in Demographic Variables

1. Unequal treatment girls get relatively to boys
   Most obvious manifestations of the phenomenon is reflected in the following demographic variables:
   (a) Sex ratio in the total population
   (b) Sex ratio of the juvenile population 0–6.
2. Biological law and its implication for the sex ratio. In India shortfall of women.
3. What are the determinants of this imbalance in the Sex Ratio?
   (a) Differential enumeration of men relatively to women in the censuses. In 1961, 8.6% of all men but 11.2% of all women were lost from Census count; by 1991 these percentages were 17.3% for men and 17.9% for women. Though relatively a larger share of both men & women were undercounted, the differential had narrowed. This therefore cannot be said to be the prime cause for the observed shortage of women in the overall population.
   (b) Sex differential in mortality by age
   Best summary index of this is expectation of life at birth.

1970–75:	Males	50.5	Females were lower	49.0
1981–85:	Males	55.4	Females were marginally higher	55.7
By 1991–98:	Males	60.0	Females were	61.8

   (c) Differences in IMR and child mortality much more glaring

IMR in 1985:	Boys	96	Girls	98
1999:	Boys	69.8	Girls	70.8

   Child Mortality: Age specific death rates

1985: 0–4 age	Boys	36.7	Girls	40.5
5–9 age	Boys	3.3	Girls	4.2
1998: 0–4 age	Boys	21.0	Girls	24.1
5–9 age	Boys	2.1	Girls	2.4

   (d) Sex Ratio at birth has departed from 107 to 111 to 112 boys for 100 girls.
   (e) Most disturbing is the declining sex ratio in the 0–6 age group. It was initiated in the 1980s but has declined steeply over the 1990s.

IV. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Gender inequality is socially unjust as it treats men and women differently. The Constitution of India not only grants equality to women but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women for neutralizing the social, economic, educational and political disadvantages faced by them. Fundamental rights ensure equality before law, equal protection of law, prohibits discrimination against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth. These rights further guarantee equality of opportunity to all citizens in matters relating to employment. Despite these comprehensive constitutional provisions it is clear from the analysis in the earlier sections that women are victims of discrimination. Social discrimination denies them access to education which in turn deprives them the freedom to choose what they would care to do and results in their subordination within their homes. We dealt at length in particular with the gender-based inequalities in the labour market. Even fifty years after accepting the constitution, women were treated unequally in the labour market even after the State in India intervened to guarantee certain rights to them through legislative measures.

Opinions however differ on whether the state should intervene in the labour market. Some economists, who are opposed to government interventions in the labour market, feel that they are redundant and often harmful. But history shows that gender-based discrimination has defied time. Social reformers therefore advocate governments to adopt measures to end such injustice in the society in general but in the labour market in particular. Measures advocated depend upon the discipline to which an individual belongs.

Economists, following Becker's (1957) taste-for-discrimination model would argue that policy makers should advise employers to do away with their prejudices regarding employment of women. Punishment as a disincentive is often suggested, so that employers are dissuaded from having prejudices against women workers. Horizontal segregation could be reduced through legislation of equal pay for equal work while vertical segregation by policies of reserving positions for women. These are demand side interventions but on the supply side women continue to be discriminated against because they lack access to education, information, training and work experience. This could only be eliminated if women get opportunity to improve their capabilities through education and formation of skills.

Limitations of a purely legal approach to reduce gender-based discrimination are many. Employers may bypass legislation by employing various tactics. For instance, laws forcing employers to give equal pay for equal work could be avoided by employing only women. We passed the Equal Remuneration Act in India way back in the 1970s but neither the employers nor women were aware of its existence almost 10 years after it was passed. Reservation policies may help in the long run but often may not help change the existing situation. Some of these efforts made by the government have met with limited success.

Radical social scientists on the other hand feel that gender-based discrimination starts within the family and is the root cause of gender inequality women experience in the labour market. They question the efficacy of legal and economic measures that could be adopted to end discrimination. Though this is true to some extent, it would be incorrect to argue that state has no role to play in making efforts to reduce gender-based inequalities.

Economics, like any other social science, by itself does not offer solution to the problem of gender-based inequalities that are inherent in all societies. But it does identify factors, which if affected could go long way in reducing gender inequalities, which in turn could reduce social and economic discrimination based on gender in any society. The approach to policy need not be purely economic in fact should be multi-disciplinary in nature because gender inequality could be attributed to social, cultural and economic factors and man–woman relations within households and in the society. Our analysis shows that gender inequalities have not been eliminated completely in the Indian society. But efforts of the government have been able to reduce them at least to some extent. Efforts to reduce the tyranny of the household women experience, through social awareness of the value of the work, women do even at home, would have to be strengthened. Policies to make society aware of the value of education in general but that of women's education in particular would have to be pursued vigorously in the future than in the past. Finally, economic policies that aim at treating women on par with men in the labour market through legislative measures would have to be implemented so that they could go long way in empowering women in the labour market. All these policies if pursued wholeheartedly, could go long way in making women true contributors to development, social and economic. This in turn is likely to reduce gender-based inequalities in our society.

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CHAPTER 14

Women Workers and Industrial Restructuring in Two Industries in Mumbai

Nandita Gandhi and Nandita Shah

INTRODUCTION

Is industrialization a gendered process? And more importantly, how does industrialization absorb and shape women's labour? These questions have been at the centre of a substantial part of feminist discourse and research. Different time periods and labour market situations have thrown up some important theories of women's labour. The first significant theory, the female marginalization theory or the theory of women's exclusion from modern industry, has also been analyzed as the capitalist separation of production and reproduction.[1] The concept of the reserve army of labour[2] has been interpreted with a feminist perspective. With the induction of a large number of young, unmarried women into the labour market in the 1980s began the debate on the New International Division of Labour.[3] Since then the processes of structural adjustment, liberalization of the economy and globalization in many Third World countries have once again raised the issue of the nature of women's labour, its precariousness and insecurity.[4]

This article explores the extent to which industrial restructuring, an outcome of global competition, is a gendered process using the concept of flexibility strategies. It is based on a micro study of 360 women workers in two industries, plastics processing and diamond polishing and jewellery manufacturing industries in Mumbai, India.[5] We begin with a general picture of the women in the two industries, women's position in the task, skill hierarchy and their perspective on security. We then focus on the nature of flexibility strategies and how women experience them at their workplace. We elaborate on how the three dimensions of flexibility strategies, namely organizational structure flexibilities, production process flexibilities and labour market flexibilities are being implemented in the two industries. Did the new post-Fordist flexibility strategies find a resonance in the two industries? Theorization around flexibilization and flexible strategies has suggested that there is a skill enhancing process, a division of the labour force into 'core' and 'periphery' workers and a feminization of the workforce. We explore whether these processes had occurred in the two industries and how women view the transformations in their workplaces.

PART 1
THE WOMEN

The women were mainly Maharashtrian, Hindu from non-Brahmin castes, living in the working class colonies of Jogeshwari, Borivili, Malad, Dharavi and Dahisar. Some of them were the daughters of the early textile workers who had settled in Mumbai after having migrated from the Konkon region of Maharashtra. The majority of our women respondents were young, literate and unmarried. They lived in nuclear households of four to five people at poverty levels. Forty-one per cent of the households were at subsistence level with a per capita income between Rs 421 and Rs 840. Twenty per cent of them had a per capita income of less than Rs 420 or below the poverty line as defined by official statistics. They had both men and women earners with not very high incomes. Most women had been helped by their family members or neighbours to access their jobs. Usually, women from better off households could afford the education, training fees/deposit or a non-waged period to access semi-skilled or skilled jobs.

THE SELECTED INDUSTRIES

One of the features of the plastics processing industry is the employment of semi- and unskilled workers especially in the informal sector and successfully coping with the advanced technology, sophisticated designs of the West and low consumption levels at home. The plastic processing or product industry is a small section, often subsumed under plastic, rubber and allied products.[6] It is a growing industry but located at the lower end of the Indian industrial spectrum in terms of the net value added, output and profits. The plastics industry is vast in its product range and different types of polymers but basically consists of three interlinked segments: polymer (raw material) manufacture, recycled plastic manufacture and products manufacture. The new liberalization policies were initiated in 1991 as the new economic policies brought about a veritable upheaval. Large firms, especially the raw material manufacturing ones, were quick to protect their market and simultaneously restructure for expansion and competition. The large product manufacturers with access to finances joined the restructuring bandwagon. The small and tiny ones with few overheads and low infrastructure costs could quickly relocate but the medium ones doing independent sub-contracting jobs were caught between the restructuring manoeuvrings of the large ones and the liberalization policies of the state. With cheaper and better quality goods coming from East Asia, there was little hope for them.

The diamond polishing and jewellery industry was favourably affected by the new economic policies. As an export oriented industry, it has been the beneficiary of lower duties, import facilities and tax holidays as early as the 1960s. The industry was afraid that the government might withdraw these concessions. They have devised strategies to expand, improve production and seek new local and international markets. The medium and small firms in the industry are mainly polishing firms. Their claim to fame is that they polish half of the 70 per cent rough diamonds imported into India. Their fortunes are dictated by the release of material by De Beers, worldwide recession and changes in worldwide demand from the West and Japan. Unlike the large firms, they have not seen much change in their functioning or fortunes. They continue to mushroom and die according to raw material supplies and consumer demand. Only a few of them have turned to specialization of tasks or modernization of the production process. Nor is there a trend towards ancillarization, which would give some stability to medium and small firms. Their numbers are slowly diminishing as large firms centralize all stages of production and trading of roughs is at a low (see Table 1).

Table 1
Distribution of Women Workers according to the Size of the Firm and Industry

Size of the firm based on employment	Plastics	Diamonds	Total
Non-unit based	6.6	0	3.3
Tiny (1–10 workers)	42.2	0	21.1
Small (11–20)	31.6	8.3	20.0
Medium (21–100)	10.5	42.7	26.6
Large (100+)	8.8	48.8	28.8
Total	100	100	100
	n = 180	n = 180	n = 360

WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT AND WORK

Employers from both industries gave an off the cuff estimate of 10 per cent women's employment to the total number of workers. In our sample of firms, the ratio of women workers to total number of workers was much higher. In the diamond processing and jewellery industry, it was 17.5 per cent and in the plastics processing industry it was as high as 36.2 per cent. Why do employers hire women, place them in certain jobs, under what conditions and why do women opt for them? Both the employers and the women gave a variety of reasons; some of them echoed each other's rationales but in a different timbre and pitch. An important criterion was youth or what employers called 'fresh workers'. The majority or 81 per cent of them were below the age of 30 years with a fairly large number or 27 per cent below 20 years. In the diamond processing and jewellery industry, youth was also associated with keen eyesight and stamina. In spite of its existence for more than forty years, the diamond processing industry mainly has young workers with only a few or 4 per cent in their prime age of 30–40, only one above 40 and none at all in the elderly category.

Most employers preferred unmarried women as they could keep flexible working hours. Absenteeism was discouraged in most firms as the workers had specific jobs or were required for overtime. In case of quick delivery or large orders, 90 per cent of firms had overtime on a regular or seasonal basis and 56 per cent of women workers had to compulsorily do overtime. They could arrive at an internal arrangement with other workers but a stipulated number of workers had to stay behind to complete assignments.

The issue of marriage and women was a contentious one for both the employers and women. Married women were expected to take leave, wriggle out of overtime and leave work for domestic responsibilities. But reality shows otherwise. There was a minimum difference in overtime hours put in by married and unmarried women. Thirty five per cent of married women were doing an average of two hours of overtime. The majority of married women had extended families with other female members looking after their children. About 30 per cent of married women had been working for more than five years and quite a number of them had worked in the same unit for more than 10 years. Employment was in many cases a prerequisite for marriage. Both married and unmarried women wished to help their families as well as experience some feeling of autonomy and newer forms of social contacts apart from close kin. The working culture in the city aided these aspirations. Married and unmarried women both were doing what was expected of them at the workplace, but there was no doubt that married women had greater responsibility and more work at home.

Employers believed that there was a low level of literacy amongst women. But in our sample only 12 per cent were illiterate and 43 per cent had gone up to the 5th standard, and the rest had attempted the Secondary School Certificate (SSC). Some had procured the certificate and a few had gone on to college. In the export zone, employers were using the Standard X or the school certificate as a criterion for the selection procedure. Women said that formal education in the case of labour intensive skills was not necessary. Ninety two per cent of the workers reported that their training took place in-house. The training period and payment for training differed in both industries. In plastic processing firms most of the workers were trained in less than 15 days and both illiterate and literate workers were put on the same tasks and in the unskilled category. In diamond firms the maximum number or 59 per cent of workers were trained for three to six months, 82 per cent of trainees had to pay some deposit 'for breakage and cost of learning' which would be returned only after one year to ensure that the trainee did not leave after the training period. In both industries, older workers trained new comers.

Both the employers and women agreed that women workers were less mobile than men and did not shift firms for trivial reasons. Almost half the women workers or 48 per cent stayed in the same workshop after training. Men were more likely to change jobs because of their network of contacts, self-confidence, speed and skill levels. Even in a labour surplus situation, it was disadvantageous for employers to have a highly mobile workforce as some time was lost in recruitment and training. Women were less mobile with only nine per cent changing three or more jobs in a period of five years. It appears that women valued emotional security.

In both industries, employers had followed the established practice of giving women 'light' tasks like sorting, finishing, packing, checking or polishing and supportive work. Women too were conscious of this division between heavy, manual work (for men) and lighter work (for women). Sometimes a change in equipment reduced the need for physical force but it was still labelled 'men's work'. Most employers encouraged women to opt for training in polishing rather than shaping of rough diamonds. In plastics processing firms, women who were given 'light' jobs were also lifting loads and doing men's work in their absence. Employers continued calling these jobs light so as not to create resentment amongst men. Employers separated the regular heavy work done by men and occasional heavy work given to women, even though in some cases 'occasional' was quite often. Employers promoted and colluded with this notion as they did not have to pay men's wages for those jobs.

In the diamond processing industry, 44 per cent of women were semi-skilled polishers, a few did the skilled job of shaping diamonds and none had entered the field of setting. In the plastics industry 48 per cent were packers and finishers whilst 32 per cent were helpers and sorters. There were hardly any men doing this work, except for occasionally helping women out in times of surplus or emergency orders. Women workers were aware that they were being placed in low skilled and low paying jobs.

Table 2a
Women's Position in the Task and Skill Hierarchy in Two Industries

The Diamond Polishing and Jewellery Industry

Task hierarchy	Percentage of women workers	Skill status
Supervision	1.1	–
Shaping	9.4	skilled
Diamond setting	5.0	skilled
Polishing	43.9	semi-skilled
Sorting & clerical	10.6	unskilled
Preparatory processes before polishing	30.0	unskilled
	100	
Total	n = 180	

Table 2b
The Plastic Processing Industry

Task hierarchy	Percentage of women workers	Skill status
Supervision	0.6	–
Machine related	0.9	skilled
Printing/Painting	3.3	semi-skilled
Assembly	11.1	unskilled
Packing & finishing	52.6	unskilled
Helping & sorting	28.2	unskilled
Rag collection	3.3	unskilled
	100	
Total	n = 180	

Both industries had a different hierarchy of tasks. Diamond polishing had three main tasks, shaping, polishing and support, performed by workers in *galas*. Diamond jewellery manufacture required various stages, which ended with studding the polished diamonds. In the plastics processing firms, there are broadly two types of work: machine operation and a conglomeration of finishing, sorting, packing and checking tasks. Regardless of the size of the firm or industry, supervisors headed the operations. The nature of the tasks performed by women is given in Tables 2a and 2b.

Caste and region were two of the other factors, which came into play in job recruitment and task allocation. Traditional caste based work like sweeping and cleaning was allocated and accepted by the lower caste women and men. In our sample, in plastics processing firms, lower caste women were employed for the sorting of dirty plastic items. Thirty five per cent of scheduled caste and 27 per cent of other backward caste women were employed in sorting tasks. Not a single *brahmin* woman was involved in this task.

There was a correlation between the employers' and workers' regions in the polishing workshops. Gujarati owned, small diamond polishing firms tended to hire men from their villages or regional area. However in the export firms, employers had to turn to local workers as Gujarati male immigrants were unwilling to work as a steady workforce. Bengali men, who had been trained in the traditional craft by their families or patrons, did highly skilled work in diamond firms. Maharashtra also has communities like the *sonars* with the skill of making gold and silver jewellery, but they have made no inroads into the export firms. Plastics firm owners preferred male migrants from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh for heavy loading and machine work. Both men and women shared the general characteristics of their industry and firm. The majority of the workers in both industries were piece rated or daily, temporary workers with little or no bonus, leave facilities and benefits. Women's low skill levels and job positions were reflected in their wage levels.

Ideally, workers should be recruited on the criteria of merit, willingness and ability. But many studies and our own data showed that the workplace is hardly a gender, caste or region-wise neutral place. It produces and reproduces prevalent social practices.[7] Our data showed that there was a clear gender, caste and region-wise hierarchy at the workplace, which employers were successfully using to strategize for the organization of the workplace.

Employers, consciously or unconsciously, work out overall workforce strategies as they juggle to survive and/or make profit against the vagaries of the market, competition, collective bargaining and the disadvantages of a flexible labour force. In the course of our interviews with them, we detected several clues as to how employers use gender, caste and region in their favour. Prevalent gender ideology came in handy in convincing both the employers and women workers that young, new entrants into the labour market could easily and without too much responsibility or training fit into lower end jobs. And the preferred male workers could hardly object to the number of women in tasks rejected by them.

There is a gender perspective to the employer's use of caste and region. In plastic product firms, the three levels of tasks also had a caste and region dimension. Maharashtrian men were the machine operators. Bihari men were given loading and heavy work and lower caste women were given jobs like sorting. In diamond processing and jewellery *galas*, there was a dominance of Gujarati men from the same caste and community as the owner. Eighteen per cent of women respondents said that Gujarati men were favoured for recruitment by employers over other communities. It would have been impossible to introduce Maharashtrian men polishers without creating competition and unrest. But women posed no such problem. A firm of only Gujarati men would have lowered the bargaining position of employers. A small group of women workers would be back-up or reserve workers with a known track record of lower mobility. Women formed the 'contingency group' for the overall strategy of employers to 'mix' and balance workers, their different identities, tasks, wages, the profitability of the organization.

CATEGORIES OF WORKERS

To help us build a comprehensive worker profile, we asked our respondents what they would have liked to be and what made them feel secure at the workplace. For most workers 'security' was synonymous with permanency. So we asked them the question in a variety of ways: what were the different ways in which they saw themselves as secure or safe at the workplace? What would they call an ideal job? What made them happy or satisfied? And on the other hand, what were they afraid of, what made them feel at risk?

'What a question to ask! Money is the only thing that can give you a sense of security.

'We need to buy a room. It's the most important thing in life. That's security for me.'

'The diamond polishers in the *galas* earn more per piece than we do here at the export unit. But we get other things like leave and allowances. When I retire I will get a provident fund.'

'Finally you have to look after yourself. My hands are my only security.'

We have used employment security, income security and organizational representation security to arrive at a labour status categorization. A composite index was formulated using work status, nature of contract, legally entitled benefits, minimum wages and trade union organization. The index resulted in seven categories of women, which we re-categorized into three broad groups (see Table 3):

- 'Secure workers' were legally protected, drew above minimum level wages, had legally entitled benefits and trade union representation.
- The 'moderately secure workers' had only one of the three securities, e.g. some diamond polishers were receiving above minimum wages. Workers in some large plastics firms had labour representation and above minimum wages but no permanency.
- 'Insecure workers' had none of the three securities and formed the most vulnerable group.

Only nine per cent of the women had the three basic securities. These were skilled workers from the export firms of the diamond processing and jewellery and some women from large, unionized plastics firms. For the majority or 52 per cent, their hands were their only security. They constantly feared retrenchment, had inadequate wages and faced health hazards. These were mainly daily wage workers from plastics tiny, small and medium sized firms. The insecure group from diamond workshops were salaried administrative support or trainees, or those working on automatic machines. Thirty-seven per cent women had only one of the three securities. A large number of them were diamond polishers in the *galas*, who had above minimum level wages as they were skilled or semi-skilled piece rated workers. Most of the 18 per cent plastics firm workers had labour representation.

Table 3
Labour Categories (Percentage of Women according to the Industry)

Labour Category	Diamond	Plastics	Total
Secure workers	11.1	6.6	8.9
Moderately secure	69.4	17.7	38.6
Insecure	19.4	85.5	52.5
Total	50	50	100 n = 360

PART II

THE CONCEPT OF FLEXIBILITY STRATEGIES

The sweeping changes in Western economies during the 1970s and 1980s, a realignment of international capital, technological innovation, the decline of the manufacturing sector and the success of Japanese production techniques encouraged a return to a more conservative economic model of deregulation and privatization. These changes were interpreted by academics and policy makers as a crisis in the dominant, post World War system of mass production or the 'Fordist' model and the emergence of what came to be called the 'flexi firm' model and the notion of flexibility. In a broad sense it has been defined as 'the capacity to change'. Boyer emphasized the 'ability of a system or sub system to react to various disturbances'. Michon said, '...flexibility becomes imperative in the context of rapid change...'. Atkinson defined 'dynamic flexibility' as '... changes to institutional, cultural and other social or economic regulations and practices, which permanently increase the capacity to respond to change'.[8]

In the pioneering work of Piore and Sabel[9] flexibility was introduced by a vertical disintegration of the manufacturing process into a number of individual 'flexibly specialized' firms, which functioned with mutual co-operation as a network, with computer controlled machines and a skilled labour force. For the French Regulation theorists, flexibility or neo-Fordism was a new form of capitalist control. For others it would result in a 'core' and 'periphery' workforce or a flexible workforce for a better managed flexible firm

Many looked at it as a decisive shift from the past and Fordist model to a new, non-Fordist one.[10] The common point of departure for most theories using the framework of flexibility is the crisis in the Fordist model of mass production and its inability to maintain the rate of production, rigidity of the process and wage levels. And that it would be increasingly necessary for industry to turn to flexible strategies in order to survive. Therefore restructuring of the labour process or flexibilizing them and the creation of a flexi-labour force are particularly highlighted. The amorphousness of the definition of flexibility has prompted theorists to use typologies, diagrams and outcomes.

Elson has classified three dimensions of flexibility. Flexibility in the organizational structure includes the de-centralization of production by subcontracting, creating split units, relocation of main or branch units and backward/forward integration. Flexibility in the pattern of production means doing away with the notion of job description and the rigid divisions between different types of job, in favour of a generalized, on the job, training for all types of work for all workers. Workers are also involved in quality standards and budgetary cuts through various management techniques. A reorganization of the skill hierarchy results from general training, rotation of jobs and the blurring of lines between supervisory and operational staff. Such internal mobility is interfaced with changes in technology and product diversification and design. The degree of adaptability of a firm depends on the existing market conditions and its financial capacity to reorganize. Flexibility of the labour market focuses on streamlining of the workforce, regulating wages and working hours, casualizing its permanent workforce and curtailment of collective bargaining. Proponents of this strategy advocate the removal of all types of state regulations so that employers can determine contracts with workers in accordance with market demands and productivity. They promote easy employment, right of dismissal, and making workers part time/temporary/piece rated. Similarly wages should be determined by financial viability of the firm, individual productivity and the general labour supply situation. Rigidity of wages, it is argued, introduces 'distortions'.[11]

The use of flexibility strategies results in greater numerical, functional, wage and production flexibility for the employer. Atkinson defines these as: numerical flexibility in which employers change work hours and number of workers according to their production requirements at short notice; functional flexibility promotes multiple skills amongst workers to increase efficiency; wage flexibility allows employers to increase and decrease wages or change terms of payment according to requirements and production flexibility promotes subcontracting part or whole products outside the firm.[12]

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE FLEXIBILITY

Relocating and Splitting Firms

These strategies involve fundamental organizational decisions on the location, scope and size of the firm, focusing on core competence, subcontracting and forward and backward integration which require management and financial capacity. Resort to relocation was seen more clearly in large firms, with credit facilities or resources of their own. Other flexibility strategies usually follow the crucial decision of relocation. The high cost of infrastructure and labour in the city and government incentives in the form of subsidized space, electricity and water and tax holidays, were strong motivators for relocation and the implementation of an integrated package of flexibility strategies. Most large firms tended to reorganize their product range as well as their production process and labour requirements. Some of them undertook backward or forward vertical material/product integration to cut down manufacturing costs. Automation or new technological changes improved the quality of the product and/or expanded the range of products and designs. This would invariably lead to a reorganization and retraining of the labour force.

A typical example is that of a well-known manufacturer of branded plastic furniture and bottle crates, Supreme Industries, which found imported Italian goods eating into its share of the domestic market. The company gradually shifted out to 'greener pastures' or subsidized industrial zones in the hinterland, purchased new, state-of-the-art machinery and applied for the ISO 9000 certification. The financial cost of shifting was weighed against subsidized land, cheaper electricity costs and tax benefits. Investment in new machinery had the advantage of lower labour costs. The premises in Mumbai were partly used as office headquarters, for research and development and for the manufacture of surplus orders. Some of the workers were retrained; some new ones were hired and the rest were retrenched or offered voluntary retirement scheme (VRS). The new plant had the production organized in such a way that one person could visually supervise it. The new machinery reduced the workforce by nearly half, as one worker could now perform several tasks. The earlier jobs of loading, finishing and packing were made redundant. Technical personnel who supervised and maintained the machinery supported workers.

Such top level management decisions were rarely made after taking workers or their unions into confidence. Unions have been known to oppose the implementation of changes as they fundamentally affect the workforce and even try to sabotage them.[13] But news of such ongoing plans is hard to keep secret. A woman worker said, 'The boss secretary told us that he had spoken about shifting the factory. We asked her what would happen to the workers, but she did not know. So we asked our supervisor. He said the men already knew so why had they not told the others. The men were making their own plans. Now we would have to consult our families and make ours'. Usually workers are given the option of voluntary retirement or shifting to the new factory. Men have the option of shifting with their families but women usually accept the retirement scheme.

Supreme has been able to reduce its labour force from 450 workers to 149 workers by 1995. There are similar examples of relocation and the implementation of an integrated flexibility package amongst other large industrial companies. Hindustan Lever, a giant pharmaceutical company, in 1982, relocated and decentralized itself from two large plants to twenty small ones and a network of subcontracting firms. Six hundred women workers (from a total workforce of 1500) were slowly reduced to only three through retirement schemes or dismissals. Another pharmaceutical company, Rhone-Polec, shifted from Mumbai to the remote area of Aurangabad and in the process reduced its workforce of 300 to 55.[14]

Many women in our sample said that they were unaware of any management plans for relocation. Even if they knew they felt that they had very little choice. '*Arre*, what do you expect me to do? I cannot leave my family and go off. So better to take the offer, no quarrels and get out', said one worker. Most felt that if they were given a large sum of money as compensation they had no objection to leaving. Their families would be happy with the additional money. Very few were aware of the problems of finding alternative work. An even smaller number of women said that they would ask their unions to help them resist being given the VRS. On the other hand, in the tiny firms women immediately came to know of their employers' plans for relocation. Tiny firms, especially in plastics recycling, can easily relocate themselves as their simple machinery can be packed in a truck and moved quickly with little expense. Workers could plan, in advance, to find alternatives, sometimes with the help of the employer who was more than happy to assist them as he had no compensation to offer.

It was difficult for medium and small sized firms in our sample to execute an integrated flexibility strategies plan. They were more prone to stay where they were and used the strategy of splitting firms. A smaller firm gave them access to the status of a small scale industry with different rules and regulations for credit and customs duty. In some cases, there was no geographical division and split firms nestled side by side, manufacturing the same product range. Some were located in different industrial estates to produce different facets of a product. Many medium and small diamond polishing firms had one owner who looked after two or more firms. One diamond jewellery manufacturer had split firms, one in the export zone and another outside, making the same type of jewellery.

Workers, in spite of the employer's secrecy, came to know of the split firms. Their main concern was the difference in the wages and benefits given to the other firm workers. The jewellery manufacturer had to pay his workers the same rate in both firms. But another large polishing firm had two sets of wage systems and wage levels for the export zone firm and the city firm. Export zones have different labour regulations whereas labour in a small firm in the informal sector costs less. A worker said, 'How does it matter to us if the boss has one or three firms? My main concern is higher wages. If he can have so many firms, he is a rich man and should pay us well with a bonus'. Most workers, especially women, had their vision so centred around their work and wages that they were not concerned that this method gave owners tax benefits and the flexibility of closing down a firm without disturbing production yet reducing labour and infra-structural costs.

There were only a few firms in our sample, which had done backward and forward integration. Only Supreme, the plastics product manufacturer from our sample of firms had been able to achieve backward integration by manufacturing plastic raw material. Though such terms were not used in the diamond processing and jewellery, manufacturing jewellery by the diamond polishing units is part of forward integration. And some of the jewellery units opened their own polishing units, which are examples of backward integration. They were into expansion of production and experimenting with marketing their own branded products to promote themselves.

Subcontracting

The other organizational strategy used by both small and big firms was subcontracting part or the whole product to another manufacturer. Subcontracting has been defined as the giving out of a part or whole order by a large or parent firm ('the giver') to another usually smaller one ('the taker'). The latter may, according to design specifications, produce materials or components, assemble parts, do processing, provide a specific service, or manufacture the end product. In the diamond processing and jewellery, the 'giver' is the site-holder or the procurer of rough diamonds but he may or may not be the final user of the product – the polished stones. He may choose to trade them to different clients belonging to the polishing industries or jewellery manufacturing.

There are different types of subcontracting methods. 'Economy subcontracting' is the term used to describe the rationale of large firms giving contracts when they are interested in cutting their production and labour costs by contracting out some part of their production. It helped reduce overall costs by not investing in machinery or labour costs for parts of products. The majority of diamond jewellery manufacturers had their polishing done in small workshops outside rather than in the house. It was a common practice for large plastic manufacturers to get small parts like bottle lids or other parts manufactured by subcontractors. Companies like the TV manufacturers Videocon and refrigerator manufacturers like Godrej, amongst several others, do not even have a manufacturing firm. They get their entire product produced by subcontractors for them, which they then brand and market. None of the firms in our sample gave out a 'commercial subcontract'. A third type of contracting is called 'capacity subcontracting' or the giving of surplus orders by large firms to smaller firms. This was a common practice in the export zone for diamond jewellery manufacturing and also amongst plastics processing firms. Sometimes small firms give their surplus orders to other small firms. About 31 per cent of all firms in our sample were subcontracting work to other firms.

The subcontracting system functions as a shock absorber for the larger, dominant enterprises. Pricing, quality control and the right to reject make the subcontracting relationship extremely biased in favour of the parent firm. As there are numerous firms and the work uses low technology and skills, there is ample choice for the large firms. Multisourcing and a surplus of labour ensure a good bargain. Thus the relationship between the contractor and the processing sector firms is unequal and skewed in favour of the former, who has access to competitive rates. The large firms' expenses are considerably cut down. Firms can compete as well as give surplus or rush orders to other firms. This keeps costs down, as the workforce is fully and productively occupied. Secondly, it gives the large firms an easy way to withdraw when there are decreased supplies and financial constraints. Thirdly, the contractor can utilize specialized firms like laser cutting.

However, the subcontracting system also posed several problems for large firms. It was an open secret that in the diamond processing and jewellery traditional *gala* owners switch diamonds or cut them in a way to get more pieces. The main reason given by large manufacturers for vertically centralizing all production was the poor quality of polishing and unreliable delivery. These problems are inherent in any subcontracting system that has an unequal relationship between the giver and taker of the contract. Most small subcontractors are 'independent', taking orders from numerous sources. Most of the firms in our sample were medium sized ones in the informal sector engaging around 20 workers on a piece rate or daily wage system. These subcontractors could only be competitive if they cut their costs by depressing wages. Workers informed us that their wages had not been revised for the past four years. The labour force was minimally trained and worked under terrible conditions. Owners stretched the use of their machinery, did not replace old ones and cut down any infrastructure cost except the basics. It was not surprising that the end product was of poor quality, with unreliable delivery dates as the owners juggled with several orders just to survive.

The well-placed 'independent' subcontractors were those taking specialized work. They had found a niche in market for a specific product. For example, a medium sized firm used to produce fans for cooling in a variety of machinery. After the de-reservation of items, such fans were imported from Taiwan in bulk. However, the imported ones were standardized items, and did not fit certain machines. They had to be custom-made within the city and it was this niche creation that helped the firm get regular orders.

Down the line, the most quality conscious but least secure subcontractors are those totally dependent on one large firm. They are also called ancilliary firms, a more refined name for captive subcontractors. Many firms in Dharavi fell in this category. They were small firms with a few workers and a couple of machines. Large firms in both the industries helped a few of their trusted workers to set up small firms and become captive subcontractors. Plastics manufacturers give tasks like screen printing to older or trusted workers. Captive subcontractors are the worst hit in crisis and by competition. Most of these firms have a high death rate. Bose pointed out that a five per cent fall in the growth of large firms is said to result in a 100 per cent fall in the demand for ancillary items.[15] In the diamond processing and jewellery, the December to June 1997 crisis saw several large firms withdraw orders because of decreased supplies and financial constraints, impelling several firms to down their shutters.

The system of subcontracting benefits the large firms insofar as they can decentralize production and cut costs. It also generates employment, as seen in the success stories of the 'world market factories' or the international subcontracting workshops for electronics, shoes and garments. In the 1970s, governments of the global South set up free trade zones and export zones to facilitate international subcontracting and thousands of young women were employed in them for their 'nimble fingers'. Studies have shown that subcontracting thrives on a flexible labour force. Any form of unionization or collective bargaining for better wages and conditions sees a closure or a flight of capital.

The main characteristics of such a labour force were job and employment insecurity; narrow content of work that was easily learnt; flexible payment systems like daily wages or piece rate payment and no trade union representation. Both men and women in subcontracted firms are insecure. However, men were more likely to be in the core workers' group that controlled machinery and other upper-end skill tasks, than women. Skill and networking come in handy for men to bypass the worst effects of informalized work. Through gossip, information sharing and kinship ties, men build contacts, which are used for job mobility and for in between jobs work.

Most women did not have these means. First, their networks were small and it was not easy to access jobs. They had to depend on male colleagues or family members to help them find another job. Secondly, they were at the bottom of the skills ladder. During a slump or dearth of raw material, they were discharged whilst men were kept on to do both the machine based and other tasks. Thirdly, if the contractor, in order to economize, fragmented the production process, he discharged or transferred his women workers to the new contractor. One of the workers said, 'Earlier, we used to work together then the boss made our supervisor a subcontractor, now she has become our boss. We still work from the owner's premises but our supervisor is responsible for paying us and seeing that we meet our targets. She is horrible, stricter than the boss and she works us to death'.

Moreover, competition for subcontracting orders usually meant the depression of workers' wages. The majority of the women in small firms were drawing wages below the minimum level with few wage increments. Women could complain neither about their wages nor the appalling work conditions, which gave them posture problems, menstrual and respiratory disorders as a result of plastic fumes and diamond dust.

PRODUCTION PROCESS FLEXIBILITY

Flexibility strategies of the production process are introduced through changes in the existing technology, by diversifying the product range and design and/or by the training and retraining of workers. These strategies ensure an ability to shift from one product line to another if required. In more sophisticated plants, computer numerically controlled machines (CNCs) are replacing conventional machinery. Sophisticated machinery needs a different type of workforce. In the Fordist production system there was a split between work done by the workers and planning or work done by the management. In the new system workers were not only expected to know the production system but make suggestions for enhancing productivity. They were expected to perform different tasks, rotate between tasks and do simple repair and maintenance.[16] Some of these have been implemented by Japanese firms but have not been easy to replicate in other countries. The other difficulty is that these strategies require a financial capability and planning usually beyond the means of medium and small enterprises. In our sample of firms, only the large plastics processing firms were implementing these strategies as part of an integrated package in the face of intense competition from imported goods. Medium sized and small firms continued using the same machinery but found a market niche for themselves. A soft luggage manufacturer explained his survival strategy as pricing his goods between the branded names and the cheaper imported variety. Plastic equipment manufacturers offered after-sales services to tempt buyers away from foreign goods.

Production process changes have been slow in coming to the diamond polishing firms. They graduated very gradually from cottage industry type small production in homes and small workshops to firm based systematic production. Their main tool of production was the hand operated, floor based scaifes, which were replaced by semi-automatic ones with tables and stools. At present, large and small firms have basically the same machinery and skill divisions, but differ in scale and work conditions. The larger firms are centrally air conditioned with one worker on a scaife instead of two. This labour intensive work seems to have defied automation. In the late 1980s, a laser cutting machine was introduced for cutting rough diamonds to smaller pieces, but not many polishing firms opted for it. Employers said the cost of the machine was prohibitive and wastage in cut diamonds generally increased. It was more economical for them to use experienced workers for the initial cutting of small, especially hard diamonds which would otherwise crack and become useless. By the late 1990s, the value of laser machines was realized and many firms have invested in them.

Diamond jewellery manufacturers had to bypass the craftsman production process in order to produce standardized and mass products. Each stage in the modern manufacture of a piece of jewellery has its own machinery and set of workers. Machines produce separate pieces according to the original mould. The cost of making of the mould and the running of the machinery require the production of a minimum of a few thousand pieces. But the firm is not restricted to the same type of jewellery. So there are constant shifts from earrings to chains and bracelets according to the needs of the wholesale buyers and consumer tastes. Besides, changes are introduced to eliminate long production techniques, like casting instead of the mould technique. Most of the new changes seem to be in the area of deskilling the production process and training workers to take on new tasks.

MULTISKILLING AND SKILL SUBSTITUTION

Flexibility strategies of the production process are meant to make workers more adaptable by generalizing tasks (through machine and technological changes), the rotation of tasks, or skill substitution. Protagonists of these strategies have lauded the breaking down of rigid divisions of tasks between workers, blurring the hierarchy between the staff and workers and promoting enhancement of skills in the multiskilling process. Another impact of flexibility strategies, that of skill substitution or women taking over men's tasks, was observed by Standing.[17]

Global competition has forced enterprises in plastics processing industry to improve quality and cut prices in order to survive in the market. High capital-intensive machinery with improved dyes and more flexible and adaptive machines also meant a new type of workforce, one able to handle multiple tasks with understanding and responsibility. The introduction of new machinery and the retraining of workers were measures usually adopted by large firms. Retraining often means merging the skilled and semi- and unskilled jobs so that a smaller group of workers could undertake them. As it is easier for skilled workers to do semi- or unskilled jobs than vice versa, the jobs of the lower end workers were at risk. In our sample the majority of women were engaged in semi- and unskilled work and it was this section of workers who were either retrenched or eased into 'voluntary retirement'.

In the large plastics firms, a new hierarchy was emerging: management, followed by technicians, supervisors, skilled workers and lastly the support staff. The technicians, supervisors and skilled workers formed what Atkinson called the 'core' workers and the support staffs are the 'peripheral' workers. In most cases, men were retrained and retained as a multiskilled workforce. Secondly another form of deskilling was taking place: semi-skilled women workers were being demoted to support staff work like cleaning, record keeping or packing.

Medium and small firms had a task hierarchy that was distinct but quite fluid. An informal multiskilling process was being followed, as the tasks were not very complicated. Employers were encouraging their workers to learn different skills. For example, one employer quite suddenly found his regular orders cancelled because his client had opted to buy cheaper foreign goods. He was forced to accept subcontracted labour jobs, which reduced his profit margins. He immediately cut down his workforce, renegotiated with his workers to run two shifts with the machine operators working at night and the others finishing, assembling and packing during the day. Women were encouraged to learn machine operations during lunchtime so that they could step in when men were absent, but without a change in their pay or designation.

In the diamond firms, there was a gulf between types of skills and no mobility between tasks. There was little scope for training workers to be multiskilled. Rather, flexibility strategies have been used to deskill highly paid and skilled workers. Artisans and craft communities, who cut, polished and produced jewellery, had been made redundant by the organized diamond processing and jewellery. Either machines or a new trained workforce did cutting of rough diamonds on a mass scale. New workers could be trained in a few months to polish one facet of the roughs. Polishers of one facet were not moved to another, as that would require a different training. A surplus of piece rated, trained workers prevented any move towards multiskilling. In the export oriented jewellery firms, jewellery was not 'made' but manufactured piece-by-piece and assembled into a single product. Mechanized jewellery manufacture required skilled artisans only at the level of mould making. Workers were not required to have any knowledge of the art of jewellery making; rather they had to be proficient at looking after the requirements of the machine.

According to Standing, flexibility strategies introduced a substitution of tasks. Was there a transfer of women's tasks to men, or vice versa? In both industries, women tend to be at the lower end of the skills' ladder or in jobs, which men would not do because they are poorly paid. 'Women's work' was really a euphemism for a poorly paid and unskilled job that men look down upon. Both industries have their share of what has been termed 'women's work'. In the plastics firms the lower end jobs are sorting, finishing, assembly and packing. In the diamond firms, there were no men in the sorting and support tasks. The only way employers could get men to do 'women's work' was to either remove the label by upgrading the wage level, or to integrate the task with other work. Flexibility strategies of the production process included automation, which integrated several tasks but amounted to the elimination of a particular task rather than taking it over. Usually the only time men took over women's work was when the employer asked them to 'help' out during excess workload or for rush orders.

On the other hand, some women were more than eager to try their hand at newer jobs if their employers supported them. Most women would not by themselves have either learnt new jobs or demanded them. Large firms with a more fixed job division both in the plastics and diamond processing and jewellery did not provide women with such an opportunity. Seventy per cent of medium firms, 20 per cent small firms and 10 per cent tiny firms were more open to the shift. Machine operations in plastic processing firms do not need elaborate training. Many women were 'allowed' to sit at them during their lunch hours but only three per cent were employed as operators. In the diamond firms some women had made inroads into the male domain of shaping the diamond

There were only six per cent women engaged in this work, which was too small a number to pose any challenge to their male co-workers. It was young and unmarried women who were moving into these new areas of men's tasks. Women workers, in the course of interviews, mentioned a fear of machines that came from their socialization, which permitted them only a few tools like the kitchen knife and scissors. Secondly, employers were not interested in women moving to other well paying tasks. Thirdly, women did not want the additional responsibility and regularity that went with machine oriented jobs, as they already had to deal with their domestic duties.

Women who were doing men's tasks stated clearly that they would not have managed if it were not for the support of their employers. Most employers had their own reasons for promoting women's employment and allocation of work. Women were moved into new jobs created by new machines and methods. Traditionally, women were not employed for shaping or cleaving jobs as these involve responsibility and hard work. But with the introduction of laser machines, women were being employed as technicians and workers. In a reputed jewellery firm, women were for the first time being given small diamond studding work. The manager said, 'We have a policy of not hiring Bengali artisans as much as possible because they are very demanding, keep involving the union, are temperamental and take long leaves. It has been easier to employ women workers; the artisans don't feel so threatened. Employing Maharashtrian men might have led to some resistance or grumbling'. The management had split large and small diamond studding into two jobs and replaced some skilled highly paid artisans with cheaper, new labour. This was not across all the jewellery units and only a very small number of women were trained for such work.

There did not seem to be any direct substitution of men by women or vice versa, due to flexibility strategies of the production process. However, an indirect substitution was taking place because new jobs were being thrown up by technological change. Employers had the discretion of turning them into 'male' or 'female' jobs. The upgradation of women's skills came from a careful comparison of costs and benefits for men and women by employers.

LABOUR MARKET FLEXIBILITY

The main rationale of labour market flexibility strategies is to control the number of workers and raise or lower wages according to production levels, consumer patterns and demand. Our data show that both industries have been practising labour market flexibility strategies. Both have known market vagaries in raw material and consumer demand since their inception. Both have moved from the informal to the formal sector. Both have accepted existing piece rate and daily wage systems with modifications in formal sector firms.

The piece rate and daily wage systems are not new and have been prevalent in most traditional production, especially handicraft related products like leather, pottery and metalware and in some modern industries like soaps which may have a combination of daily wages or piece-rated work. Though most piece-rated work (finishing of plastic spare parts, assembly and thread cutting in garment firms) is unskilled and of low value, the work of skilled artisans is highly valued and highly paid. In the daily wage system, which probably evolved from agriculture and seasonal work, workers are given per day wages according to a fixed number of hours. These wage systems have been mooted as beneficial to both employer and employee. 'Employment without strings' as it involves the hiring of workers when required and leaving them 'free to refuse'. The wage rates are generally decided by the market and may include a bonus but no other benefits, leave or holidays. Export oriented and large firms had a dual wage system in operation. They were under a legal obligation to make workers permanent and give them benefits but they had also retained the piece rate or daily wage system. In large diamond polishing firms workers were given a basic quota of pieces and income, but the income slab increased as they polished more than the stipulated pieces.

Table 4
Distribution of Women Workers according to Wage System

Wage system	Percentage of women workers
Piece rate	28.3
Daily	32.5
Monthly	39.2
Total	100
	n = 360

THE PROMISE OF THE PIECE RATE AND DAILY WAGE SYSTEM

Both the piece rate and the daily wage systems have two types of workers at either pole. At the one end are skilled shapers in the diamond polishing firms and machine operators in the plastic processing firms. At the other are unskilled home-based workers and sorters and finishers in the plastics firms. Their wage systems depend on the nature of their work. For example, home-based workers are given a fixed number of pieces and paid accordingly. However, finishing and packing tasks in the firms are paid daily wages. There are two important features to these systems: employers can hire/fire workers as they wish and secondly they are not bound to pay anything more than wages for the working day. This guarantees an employer complete numerical and wage flexibility. Some of the common beliefs attached to the piece rate and daily wage systems are discussed in Table 4.

Speed: One of the common beliefs of the piece rate system, spread by the employers and echoed by the workers, is that the harder they work, or the faster, with more overtime, the more money they can earn. This in fact is untrue unless the worker belongs to a highly skilled or skilled category. Most of the respondents in the diamond firms were at an average earning between Rs. 900 and 1600. This might seem high if we compare it with the age and experience of women in other industries, but within the diamond processing and jewellery it is not high. In the case of the home-based workers in the plastics industry, speed is essential if the worker wants to finish her load of work, but it still does not ensure her a minimum wage per day (see Table 5):

Table 5

Comparison of Monthly Wages in the Export Firm and Informal Sector of Workers in Diamond Processing and Jewellery

	Minimum Wages	Maximum Wages
Informal sector firms	Rs. 300	Rs. 5000
Export firms	Rs. 600	Rs. 3500

There are subtle ways to control the speed of workers. Employers or managers often impose limits by giving out fewer diamonds to work on or harder ones, which take a longer time. This brought down their total tally of finished pieces to a lower number and decreased their income. Home-based workers were not given enough work, or in some cases the gap between supplies was large. In fact, rather than speed it was the skilled nature of work and overtime that made the vital difference. When asked why men earned more than women in the diamond polishing firms, 48 per cent of respondents echoed the general notion and identified higher productivity on the part of men as the reason for more wages. Thirty per cent said that men were given more skilled and highly paid work.

Thirdly, speed is limited by human capacity and does not increase with experience after some years. With age, speed in fact decreases. Without bonus, allowances and other benefits, the piece rate system deprives the worker of a higher income in the long run. In the case of home-based workers, speed and income have to be adjusted with the expenses of material or tools. Forty-six per cent of home-based workers spend their own money on equipment and part of the material. Women who had to paint brand names on electric switches were given the paint, but not the brush or the paint thinner.

Flexible Work: Theoretically in both piece rate and daily wage systems, workers could attend work or absent themselves whenever they wished. However, most workers knew that uninformed absenteeism or casual leave could result in job loss. They were in reality only entitled to Sunday holiday and that too as an unpaid holiday. Seventy-four per cent workers reported that they had no leave. Maternity leave was granted to only 26 per cent of the workers. Long holidays required the permission of the employer who decided on a lean time to let the worker go. Absenteeism and taking leave was one of the main reasons used to discharge workers. In the absence of written contracts, it was an order from the employer to the manager that discharged a worker. Flexible time could only be realized by the worker if she/he were prepared to leave the firm and risk unemployment.

Forty-one per cent of home-based workers did not take even a single day's break from work. Many women reported that they get double material on Saturday so they could work on Sunday. The low piece rate forced workers to stretch their working day. The majority of women worked all year round. Only 38 per cent women abstained from work for about 15 days in a year, for festivals, or sickness. There were only four respondents who reported that they did not work for a month or two as they go to their village for the paddy sowing season.

Mobility: Employers tried to curb firm-hopping by checking the new entrants' work history with their previous employers before hiring them. In spite of such checks, men tended to be more mobile than women, though the exact rate of mobility was difficult to gauge. This may be generally true as men have better contacts with co-workers, supervisors and employers than women. We found that women's mobility was not very high. They tended to remain in the same firm that trained them, despite being denied permanent status and despite the proximity of other firms in the same industrial estate. Women were also afraid to take the risk and were not interested in a little extra income.

Working Hours: Most piece rated and daily workers did not have much flexibility in working hours and overtime. Lunchtime was not part of their working hours. Forty-nine per cent of our respondents in the polishing *galas* said that their working day consisted of eight and a half hours. And an equal number said it stretched to nine to ten hours. Others had longer hours with a bigger lunch break, at which workers could take an afternoon nap. This was however only useful to men who had to put in overtime. Women usually went home if they lived close by or sat outside in crowded corridors or compounds. Working hours plus travelling time could add up to ten and a half hours in the day.

Both systems did not have voluntary overtime. Ninety per cent of the firms had overtime requirements either on a regular basis or according to season. In the case of the *galas*, women were not asked to do overtime because the migrant men demanded it. In the export firms, overtime was considered compulsory. Fifty-six per cent of the women were doing compulsory overtime. Sixty-five per cent of the workers reported that they had to do overtime also on holidays. For 62 per cent, the payment for overtime was at the same rate as their wages or piece rate. Only 19 per cent of the firms paid double or more for overtime and most of these were in the formal sector.

CUTTING LABOUR COSTS

Managements and employers used labour market flexibility strategies to shift the workforce out of standard, permanent and job-specific contracts. The State was planning to amend or scrap existing labour laws that protect workers' permanency and security. This was based on the understanding that permanent workers are not only expensive but become a liability during lean periods or recession. In India a group of industrialists have been appealing for a change in labour laws and an exit policy. The Finance Minister (2001 Budget speech) has announced that the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947, will be amended. Only firms employing 1000 and more workers would have to seek government permission (as against 100 worker firms) for retrenchment. The *Economic Times* (6-3-01) has computed that workers in 85 per cent of the registered firms (figures from the Annual survey of Industries 1997-98) would be out of the employment security net. Proposed changes in the Contract Labour (Regulation and Policy) Act 1970, will allow firms to use contract labour without obtaining a license. Amendments in the Trade Union Act, 1926, will raise the level of workers to 10 per cent of the current workforce for the registration of a union. The Maharashtra Government has accepted most of these suggestions and has proposed to club the different categories of the Minimum Wages Act, 1948, into a single one for industrial workers.

Our study of firms in two industries shows that labour market flexibility strategies were usually implemented along with other flexibility strategies. For example, one large plastics processing firm offered the VRS to its workers when it was relocating itself and changing to an automated set of machinery. Another medium sized firm had offered to pay for the re-location of its present workforce and their families to a rural area. It was difficult for us to get access to these workers as the trade union had struck them off their address lists. The management was uncooperative in disclosing their numbers or names and remaining workers had lost contact with them. In the majority of the large firms, women reported that employers would use the traditional part of the dual wage system to reduce their piece rate income. There was little they could do with the stipulated basic income scale, benefits and allowances. During a slump, workers could not reach the higher slab and this automatically brought their wages down. This strategy enabled firms to maintain a regular workforce and also cut their wage bills when required. None of these firms had offered the VRS to its workers. Most firms were in the process of mechanizing all tasks and therefore needed more trained workers. The management, supervisory and administrative staff did not come under the worker category and could be retrenched without a retirement scheme. As part of the larger process of restructuring, peripheral work like catering, security and maintenance was contracted out to outside agencies. There was no noticeable change in the transference of jobs from permanent to non-permanent status within the production process in large firms.

It was a totally different scene for the majority of women workers in medium and small firms in the informal sector. These firms were already using a 'traditional' form of labour market flexibility strategies in the piece rate and daily wage payment systems. The projected and accepted notion of a 'free worker' and an artisan status in the case of the diamond firms gave numerical and wage flexibility to employers. The majority of workers or 67 per cent were temporary which meant they had not been given a letter of appointment even though they had worked for numerous years in the firm. Most of the workers were given some nominal amount during the festival of *Diwali*. Thirty-four per cent did not get a bonus. Only 26 per cent received the legally entitled bonus.

Travel allowance was usually either integrated into wages, or given as an extra amount. The majority of workers or 84 per cent were not given any allowance and spent their own money on travel. Home-based workers who had to go to their suppliers spent their own money or walked the distance. They could not afford the state subsidized transport rates. Significantly, forty per cent of the workers choose to work in and around the area of their residence. Lower end job workers in the plastics industry did some basic calculations, 'If I am going to spend Rs. 100 from my meagre salary of Rs. 500 on the bus then what's the use? If I walk the distance, I will need more than Rs. 100 to buy myself some *chappals*!' said one worker.

The cost of labour borne by employers in the case of the informal sector workshops was minimal. They had no need to use any further flexibility strategies on an already flexi-workforce. The surplus labour situation in the city and the ease of training guaranteed them a pool of young workers whenever needed.

Table 6
Flexibility Strategies and Size of Firms

Flexibility Strategies	Organization Structure		Production Process		Labour Market	
Firms	Relocation	Sub-contracting	Machinery	Multi-skilling	Nos.	Wage Systems
Large	NFS	NFS	NFS	NFS	NFS	NFS
		TFS	–	–	TFS	TFS
Medium	TFS	TFS	–	TFS	NFS	NFS
	–	–	–	–	TFS	TFS
Small	–	–	–	TFS	TFS	TFS
Tiny	TFS	–	–	TFS	TFS	TFS

NFS = New Flexibility Strategies TFS = Traditional Flexibility Strategies

FACING CHANGES

Old and New Strategies

Industrial firms have to continuously strategize to maintain themselves, prevent a financial crisis or become extinct, i.e. they have to keep changing in response to the alterations in the raw material and consumer market and in government policies. But the set of strategies conceptualized as 'flexibility strategies' specifically emerged with the crisis in Fordist production and the success of Japanese management techniques. We would like to term these as the 'new flexibility strategies' (NFS). Medium and small firm owners in the informal sector in India would recognize many of them as strategies, often used for years, in their industries. We have called them 'traditional flexibility strategies' (TFS). It would be simple to conflate one with the other and dismiss the new flexibility strategies as a return of the old in another form and context. But there is a strong case for a differentiation. The context of their emergence and their fundamental objectives are wide apart. The new flexibility strategies emerged in the 1970s and 1980s and were conceptualized as a movement from a rigid, standardized, mass production system to a looser, 'leaner' and flexible one. They were more a *structural response* to an economic crisis. On the other hand, the traditional flexibility strategies emerged with handicraft and small-scale production and stayed with an expanding informal sector as a response to *cyclic changes* like slumps, changes in consumer demand and fluctuations in raw material supplies. Both strategies were being used by large, medium and small firms for either their survival and/or expansion in the changing economic environment.

Table 6 shows the specific types of traditional and new flexibility strategies used by different firms in the plastic processing and the diamond polishing and jewellery manufacturing industries. Most dimensions of the new flexibility strategies were only being used by large firms for the *creation* of a flexi-labour force through a process of casualization. They directly affected or had the potential of affecting the 'secure' section of women workers. On the other hand, the traditional flexibility strategies would affect the 'moderately secure' in the large and medium sized firms and the 'insecure' workers concentrated in the small and tiny firms.

SHIFTING OUT OF SECURITY

New flexibility strategies were mainly used by large firms in an integrated package to reduce overall infrastructural costs, production costs and wage bills to improve the quality and price of its products. The process of these changes had in some cases began much earlier than the 1991 economic reforms and in other cases they were expedited because of them. None of the firms in the sample had replicated a complete set of strategies like Just in Time or Lean Production, but had implemented a modified package suited to their conditions. The diamond jewellery manufacturers were drawing on new management techniques, like core competence and use of ancillaries for subcontracting and reforming within the framework of Fordist production. These strategies have led to the casualization of the workforce, especially of the 'secure' section of women workers who mainly work in large and some medium firms.

Unlike male workers, women were not able to even consider relocating themselves along with the plant as that choice was not given to them by the employers or not supported by their household. Women in large firms, during the course of our interviews, were still working and had only heard of VRS from their retrenched friends. 'When the neighbouring factory shifted out of the city, many people were given compensation to leave. My friend took the money because she had worked here for 20 years, her family was settled, her sons were working, the money could be used for her daughter's marriage and now she has gone to the village. Their union too supported it and said why not take the money. I am middle aged, who would give me such a well paying job, my family is not well off. I would like to continue working if they let me'. Other studies have also indicated that most women do not accept the VRS as voluntarily as employers and unions would like to believe. In our interviews, the older women in large units were open to retiring if they were offered a good compensation but the younger ones who would not get much were very upset. They had also heard about the stories of many women who took VRS after years of work and had felt traumatized at not finding other formal sector employment, and of money quickly disappearing for marriages and household needs. There are many examples of large firm relocations, which have retrenched women via VRS leading to a very difficult life for these workers and especially for single women.

Three overlapping changes introduced by the new flexibility strategies are automation of the production process, restructuring existing tasks and subcontracting work. Automation or the purchase of new upgraded machinery required different skills and retrained workers, which meant reallocation of tasks and division of the workforce. Subcontracting parts of the product led to the retention of a set of workers and retrenchment of others as they shifted to the subcontractor's firms. The results of these strategies have been seen in two, opposing ways. Piore and Sabel have highlighted the skilling process of workers in the implementation of flexible specialization of medium and small firms. In our sample, we found there was a move towards enhancement of skills of some workers in the large and medium firms. But this process had very few women. 'A lot of changes are happening. Firms are shutting down. But so far there has been no effects on us here. When my boss encouraged me to learn shaping, I jumped at the chance. Not many women want to do shaping. But I thought that it would be better for me. My father did not mind giving me money for training. Only the other male workers tried to put me off, they would say it's a hard job. It is not hard, it is difficult. But now I earn more and have a better status. If, God forbid, this firm happens to shut, I have no problem. There is always a shortage of shapers because men are shifting around looking for soft diamonds'. In the jewellery manufacturing firms, young women had been upgraded to setting small diamonds. 'Setting has always been done by Bengali artisans. The firm got some new type of machines for diamond studded jewellery. They needed more people for setting. My boss selected a few women for training to do simple setting. We are better paid than polishers but less than the artisans'.

In large plastic processing firms, automation is introduced along with retraining workers to be multiskilled. In most cases it has meant the end of women's employment as their lower end jobs were merged with the others. Employers did not generally favour the prospect of enhancing the skills of women as they were considered a temporary workforce. Women worker's families were hesitant to invest money or time in the upgradation of skills. Women themselves were reluctant because of their fear of machines and the added responsibilities. They preferred 'soft' jobs because their work did not end at the workplace but continued at home for several hours. Better and skilled jobs came with responsibilities, which they could not take unless they were liberated from household tasks. Most of the women in our sample, whether married or not, did a few hours of housework with the male members stepping in only at times of crisis or illness. Younger women were more open to upgrading their skills if their employers supported their training. Employers considered such a possibility only when women's skill enhancement was part of their 'contingency' strategy to balance skilled workers, their ethnic background and cost of skill and production.

Atkinson was more sceptical about the skilling process and said that a 'core' of workers was retrained whilst most others were placed in the 'peripheral' and flexible category. The 'core' workers were skilled or retrained to be skilled and they had relatively high paying, secure jobs with labour protection. The 'peripherals' were considered the flexi-force, which could be retained whenever needed. In their selection of 'core' workers, employers looked for a steady, experienced and skilled worker. Women were perceived as temporary, unskilled but patient workers good with minute and repetitive work. General statistical data from the Indian census would corroborate the core/male, peripheral/female dualism as there are more men in formal sector and skilled jobs than women, who are in large numbers, doing unskilled jobs in the informal sector. Data from both our industries also collaborate this presentation. Men were in the more skilled jobs and women were at the bottom rungs of the task hierarchy with little chance of skill upgradation. Further, large firms' implementation of flexibility strategies created 'core' workers through automation and multiskilling training.

This dualism does give a general picture of the position of men and women in the workforce. Unfortunately, like all dualisms, it has no space for the different layers of workers or the segmentation of the labour force. Walby found that there was a blurred line between women clerical workers who had 'staff' positions but were considered unskilled and 'production' workers earning good wages and could not be placed either in the core or peripheral categories.[18] Our data showed that there were women present in many of the top, skilled jobs and there were men and women at the bottom, semi- and unskilled jobs. The definition of skill remains quite arbitrary and can change with technology to affect their core/periphery status. There were stray examples of all women workshops doing the whole gamut of diamond polishing. Employers were encouraging women to sit on plastics moulding machines, which could become the norm in years to come. But in general this dualism is misleading and cannot be applied to most situations.

Another different case can be made against the 'core/periphery' workers formulation. Both our industries had highly skilled and skilled workers like artisans, diamond shapers and machine operators. The majority of them were on a piece rate or daily wage basis and they have resisted efforts to make them secure and permanent. They were flexible by choice or formed the 'voluntary' section of the flexible labour force. Our study confirms the observations of Carnoy et al., that these skilled workers enjoyed and profited from their flexi-status despite insecurity and forced mobility. This group of skilled and mobile workers goes against the essence of the 'core–periphery' formulation. The core–periphery categorization does give a sense of the selection process in the context of production level and labour market changes but the characteristics of the categorization should include skill and worker's control and their position in the production process.[19]

Proponents of the liberalization policy and the feminization theory have offered a sort of consolation to women workers that flexibility strategies lead to the generation of more 'woman-type work', a substitution of men by women workers and a rise in the participation rate of women. In both industries, there was only one instance of new technology creating a 'woman type' work slot, i.e. of press pot or sieving out rough diamonds according to sizes. It was an unskilled supportive task to the semi-skilled work of polishing diamonds. In the plastics industry, flexibility strategies using automation and subcontracting were eliminating women's work from the formal sector firms. A clarification on the two terms 'generation of' and 'woman-type work' is necessary for a better understanding of Standing's thesis of feminization of the workforce. 'Woman-type work' connotes that work, which is usually done by women and which is low skilled, repetitive, insecure and poorly paid performed under inadequate work conditions. Is it not tautological to ask if there is a generation of these specific jobs meant for them or were women selected for them? New tasks, created by technology or changes in the production process, do not have a gender label but are given for a specific reason. A new machine for plastics production for instance created a new job requiring the combination of three skills. It required a worker who could be trained for machine work, which had the capacity and speed for the work and who would be a steady worker. For the industry, this job description fits men more than women workers. On the other hand, the diamond polishing industry moved women into the new task of press pot as the work was easy to pick up, low valued, monotonous. Traditionally, shaping diamonds was considered a male job until new machinery was introduced and a few women joined the shapers. The maleness and femaleness of jobs also breaks down in crises when workers are rotated to do all sorts of work. Said one woman, 'The boss asks us to do all sorts of jobs. I am supposed to be in finishing but I also load the raw materials, count the pieces and pack them in jute bags. When an order has to be completed you cannot say this is my work and this isn't. We must be adjusting'.

The example of a few women who were given small diamond setting cannot be called skill substitution, because it would mean that any generation of new tasks by the introduction of technology or machines was to be considered 'male jobs'. One could not observe a large scale induction of women for these new jobs and retrenchment of men. Women were not taking over men's tasks, though they were making inroads into male domains of work like shaping and machine operation. But men were taking over some of women's tasks as they were clubbed with other tasks in the process of automation and retraining workers to be multiskilled. There was no opposition from men to take over these tasks as they were redefined and better paid. Flexibility strategies in the plastics industry was leading to a masculinization of tasks in the large firms. Lastly, our data showed that the presence of women in the labour market has more reasons than the use of flexibility strategies, i.e. women figured in the strategy of a balancing gender, caste and region, to organize a steady workforce and minimize the threat of collective bargaining.

TOWARDS INSECURITY

Traditional flexibility strategies were practiced by medium, small and tiny firms and were likely to affect the 'moderately secure' and 'insecure workers'. The 'moderately secure' workers were from diamond polishing firms, which had over minimum wages or plastics firms, which gave more than the minimum wages and/or had labour protection. Without the resources and management techniques of large, formal sector firms, the medium and small firms practicing traditional flexibility strategies were still successful in moving workers from their existing state of insecurity to greater insecurity.

These tiny firms could quickly and easily relocate by piling the entire plant in one truck and moving to the outskirts of the city or the hinterland. Workers were given the choice to follow or were helped by the employer to find another job. Men with machine operating experience could find work but most of the older women who were unskilled but had through the years become trusted and better paid dreaded the future. Remarked a woman, 'I hope this does not happen to me. My friend from the neighbouring unit, which left Mumbai had come to me asking for a job. Who will give her a job when there are younger women who will work for wages lower. She is wondering whether she should take up street hawking'.

The subcontracting strategy depends on two factors: the fragmentation of the production process and the availability of cheap and disposable labour. Firms were dismembering parts of production that were not crucial to them and involved unskilled labour or required specialized machinery. Large firms gave such jobs to subcontractors and medium sized firms set up smaller subcontracting firms or gave parts of their work to another subcontractor. Some of the large diamond jewellery firms gave their polishing jobs to medium or small workshops. Many of these *galas* gave surplus jobs to each other. The plastics firms were specialized in making specific commodities for larger firms or for the domestic market.

Worldwide recession and the restricted supply of small rough diamonds from the De Beers Company resulted in the closing down of many small firms and created an intense competition between the remaining ones. 'Usually what happens is the boss reduces a few workers and carries on hoping for more orders. Women are removed first because they do not do overtime. Then if the problem goes on, he shuts down the firm'. In spite of their large numbers, the semi-skilled or forty-five per cent of the workers had no premeditated or planned strategy for continued employment. They were confident of their recognized and fairly lucrative skill and were sure of locating another job if not in the *galas* then elsewhere. One of the older women said, 'If my boss asks me to leave, I will retire from this work. Maybe take up something else like door to door sales. Many women are doing this work. It is easy and does not require concentration'.

The plastics firms were mortally affected by the liberalization policies of de-reservation of commodities. As foreign goods started flooding the market, their contracted jobs disappeared and many shut down or switched to trading in raw materials or leased out their premises. The remaining ones were pressurized to use every strategy to compete for survival. Not having access to other methods, they intensified the use of labour market strategies pushing the unskilled workers further into insecurity. They cut down the workforce to the bare minimum by laying off workers. Medium sized firms giving over minimum wages laid off their long time but legally 'temporary' workers. Another way was increasing over time and freezing wage levels. Workers complained, 'We have not had any increments for years and now we heard that there will be no bonus this Diwali'. The informal sector medium, small and tiny firm workers were at such a minimum level, with no employment guarantees, low wages, unpaid holidays or leaves, no medical or transport allowances and no protection by law or union, that any further slide downwards would mean going over the edge of survival.

'CONTINGENCY WORKERS'

The central point of the 1980s studies was that export oriented, labour intensive and seasonal global factories needed and preferred young, unmarried women as cheap flexi-labour. There were corresponding studies in India of such a preference in the export oriented ready-made garments, electronics and shrimp factories. But the history of women's cheap labour is longer and not only restricted to export oriented factories. Women have been inducted into the labour force whenever industrial production had labour intensive and non-mechanized tasks. In India, the British owned tea plantations, and in the 1930s the early textile mills, routinely recruited young women. A case study of the Coimbatore textile mill states that half of the women workers started work as young, unmarried women. Older women remembered, '…it was easy to get a job then. The factory manager would ask us our age, and we would say fifteen, and they would take us….'[20]

Our data on the plastics products and diamond polishing and jewellery firms show that young women were recruited as 'fresh' and cheap labour for unskilled jobs. As industry moved from one phase of technology to another, the employment of women also underwent a change. The Coimbatore textile mills also employed older single women and then discontinued women in favour of younger, educated men. The plastics product firm owners continue to prefer younger women but have the maximum number of married and older women in our sample. As long as women, married or not, old or young, continued to be a flexi-force, employers had no problems in retaining them. But changes in technology as in the large plastics product firms made their jobs redundant. Women were seldom put through a retraining process for the newly created jobs. Employers, gender prejudices, not wanting to create tensions between men and women as well as women's own reluctance for skilled and more responsible jobs are some of the factors.

Women workers reported that in the past five years, the number of women had not decreased. Employers maintained that women continued to form about 10 per cent of their workforce. Why was it that the two industries, which had undergone technological and other changes in the course of flexibility strategies, had not whittled down or dismissed their women workers? One answer is that flexibility strategies as an integrated package which radically changed the workplace and its task hierarchy was taking place only in a very small number of formal sector firms. The 'secure' section of the workers was under an immediate threat. The majority of the firms were strategizing to survive but basically had the same organizational structure and production process. There was a potential threat to the jobs of the moderately insecure and insecure women. Secondly and perhaps more importantly employers did not look at women only as cheap labourers. They were also part of their 'contingency plan' of dividing and checkmating other workers by using gender, caste, and region and balancing skill, productivity and the wage bill to run a profitable firm. Employers will continue to perceive women as 'contingency workers' as long as members of women's households perceived them as 'contingency workers'. Employers cannot compete with households in claiming women's labour but can turn that claim or their domestic responsibility, their social subordination and unequal access to education and skill to their advantage at the workplace.

CONCLUSIONS

The women who had been inducted in the plastics processing and diamond polishing and jewellery industries were mainly Maharashtrian, Hindus from non-Brahmin castes as referred to earlier in part I. To help us build a comprehensive worker profile, we asked our women respondents what they would have liked to be and how they would feel secure at the workplace. For most workers 'security' was synonymous with permanency. We have used employment security, income security and organizational representation security to arrive at a labour status categorization. Only nine per cent of women had the three basic securities. We have called these the 'secure' workers. The majority or 52 per cent were 'insecure' workers.

Most of them had, through their neighbours or relatives, accessed work in the plastics processing and diamond processing and jewellery industries. The plastic processing or product industry, often subsumed under plastic, rubber and allied products, is a growing industry but located at the lower end of the Indian industrial spectrum in terms of the net value added, output and profits. The diamond polishing and jewellery industry is an export oriented industry with skilled workers. Both have been differently impacted by the new economic policies. The plastics product industry was adversely affected as cheap goods from East Asia poured in. The diamond industry, on the other hand, has been the beneficiary of lower duties, import facilities and tax holidays as early as the 1960s. The industry was afraid that the government might withdraw these concessions. Employers from both industries gave an off the cuff estimate of 10 per cent women's employment to the total number of workers. However, in our sample of firms, the ratio of women workers to total number of workers was much higher. This discrepancy between perception and reality was once again evident in the employers' rationale for women's induction into employment. They projected women as illiterate, unskilled and suited for lower end jobs whereas, women were semi-literate, had the capacity for skilled jobs and did overtime. In both industries, employers had followed the established practice of giving women 'light' tasks like sorting, finishing, packing, checking or polishing and supportive work. But the workplace is hardly a gender, caste or region-wise neutral place rather it produces and reproduces prevalent social practices. Our data showed that there was a clear gender, caste and region-wise hierarchy and ideology at the workplace, which employers successfully used to strategize for the organization of the workplace.

Part II looks at the impact of industrial restructuring on women workers. One of the main purposes of industrial restructuring was numerical and functional flexibility so firms could gear up to face price and quality competition. Organizational structure flexibility involved decisions on relocation of the firm to subsidized areas or places with cheaper infrastructure costs. Physical shifts, subcontracting non-core processes, or splitting firms usually left women out by retiring them through schemes, simply retrenching or pushing them out to subcontracted smaller firms. Either way they were bereft of a job or found themselves in a non-formal sector environment. Women's attitudes towards these changes were ambivalent with a small number of older women seeing them as a boon (compensation) and most others fearing the loss of their jobs.

It is common for firm managements to upgrade machinery and technology to improve their products and costs. But the economic reforms had made this an issue of survival. Newer production methods like casting instead of using moulds for jewellery, laser diamond cutting machines, and sophisticated machines which integrated tasks for plastic products were being adopted. Flexible strategies of the production process brought together technological changes and retraining of workers, and broke down rigid task and skill divisions between workers. Only a few women benefited from the retraining process. The majority found themselves being declared redundant as their lower end, unskilled jobs were being merged with men's work.

Labour market flexibility strategies were used to control the number and wages of the workers. In both industries and amongst all firms, the strategy was a traditional one, i.e. by using the piece rate and daily wage systems to keep the wages of workers under management control. Managements have been campaigning for the amendment of protective labour laws so as to get the right to hire and fire workers according to their production levels. Flexibility strategies, which emerged with the crisis in Fordist production methods have been called the new flexibility strategies. Large and medium sized, formal sector firms were more likely to use the new flexibility strategies for the creation of a flexible labour force. This meant that women belonging to the 'secure' category of workers were most likely to be affected by changes such as automation and clubbing of tasks, relocation of the plant and subcontracting out production. Medium and small firms intensified their use of labour market flexibilities to push the 'moderately secure' and 'the insecure' women to further insecurity. Women continued their poorly paid jobs and back breaking overtime as they waited for that fearsome moment of dismissal. Some of the advantages of flexibilization seen by Piore and Sabel, i.e. skill enhancement had bypassed women. Our data show that women have been de-skilled by flexibility strategies especially in large units, except in a few cases in the diamond processing and jewellery industry. The terms 'core' and 'periphery' workers were used by Atkinson to show the bifurcation of workers into a permanent and skilled group as against the insecure ones. The concept of 'core' and 'periphery' is problematic dualism but it does in a general way indicate a process of selection, which leaves behind women.

Given the rationale for their induction into these industries and their insecure position in the context of changes in the production process, women workers were part of what we have called the 'contingency plan'. Employers showed a shrewd sense of strategy in combining gender stereotypes, beliefs and the requirement for lower end jobs for women to serve as a back-up group and in order to divide the workforce. There was some overlap between women's own limited objectives for employment, lack of skills and the requirements of domestic labour and their employers' needs. Women not only accepted their allocation of tasks but faced the changes in the workplace without protest. Women were not unaware of their disadvantages in the labour market but, as a strategy, took up and/or withdrew from opportunities as they attempted to empower themselves without too much conflict in the household and at the workplace. Women evaluated their work and position not from the perspective of where they were in the workforce but from the perspective of what it meant for their position within their households.

Women will continue to be perceived as 'contingent' workers by employers as long as they are perceived as 'contingent' by their household members. Employers know that they cannot compete with households in claiming women's labour and gender ideology. It is only when households reduce women's domestic labour, give them equal access to education and skills and regard them as workers, that employers will be forced to revise their rationale, perception and the low status given to women workers.

NOTES

1. For an exposition on the beginning of this theory see Ester Boserup, *Women's Role in Economic Development*, London: Allen and Unwin, 1970.
2. The concept of the reserve army derived from Marx and reinterpreted by H. Braverman in *Labour and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*. London: Monthly Review Press, 1974.
3. Diane Elson and Ruth Pearson, 'Nimble Fingers Make Cheap Workers – An Analysis of Women's Employment in Third World Export Manufacturing', *Feminist Review* No. 7, 198, pp. 87–107.
4. The most quoted study was conducted for the United Nations by G.A. Cornia, R. Jolly and F. Stewart, *Adjustment with a Human Face*. New York: Claredon Press, 1987.

5. This paper is part of a dissertation entitled 'Contingent Workers: Women in Two industries in Mumbai ' submitted in November, 2002 to the University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands.
6. The Plastic Products Industry in India (Press Release by AIMPA, OPPI, IPF, Gujarat PMA June 1996).
   Consumption: 1.1 million tonnes
   Imports: 0.3 million tonnes
   Estimated value: 1400 Rs Crore
   Turnover: 8400 Rs. crore
   Export (1993-94): Rs. 814 crores
   No. of firms: 22,000
   Employment: 300,000 (Direct), 1200,000 (Indirect)
7. C. Cockburn, *Brothers, Male Dominance and Technological Change,* London: Pluto Press, 1991; L. Stobbe, *Process of In and Exclusion in the Argentine Auto Components Industry,* Ph.D Thesis for Nijemegen University, The Netherlands, 2001.
8. Boyer, Michon and J. Atkinson in different articles have defined flexibility in 'Labour Market Flexibility', *Cahiers Economiques de Bruxelles* No. 113, Jan-April, 1987.
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10. A. Pollert, Introduction, in A. Pollert (ed.) *Farewell to Flexibility,* Oxford: Blackwell Limited, 1991.
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15. A.J.C. Bose, 'Subcontracting, Industrialisation and Labouring Conditions in India: An Appraisal, *Indian Journal of Labour Economics,* Vol. 39, No. 1, 1996.
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18. S. Walby, *Gender Transformation,* London: Routledge, 1997.
19. M. Carnoy, M. Castells and C. Benner, 'Labour Markets and Employment Practice in the Age of Flexibility: A Case of Silicon Valley', *International Labour Review,* Vol. 136, No. 1, pp. 27–48.
20. I.S.A. Baud, *Forms of Production and Women's Labour: Gender Aspects of Industrialisation in India and Mexico,* New Delhi: Sage, 1992.

CHAPTER 15

Women and Water: Relationships, Experiences, Approaches

K.J. Joy and Suhas Paranjape

Woman, it is a dam I build
'Tis my death I pound
The dawn lightens the sky
The grain falls short
I cook
Broken grain and husk
Woman, it is a dam I build
'Tis my death I pound
Your sugarcane fills out
Your fields ripen
For a mouthful of water, searching
I wander the land
Woman, it is a dam I build
'Tis my death I pound.[1]

WATER: THE FOUNDATION OF LIFE AND CIVILISATIONS

Water is one of the most important requirements of life on Earth. Life initially evolved in the sea, and though plants and animals have migrated to land, they still carry around in their bodies the salt broth that envelops all life processes and must constantly be renewed. While foodstuffs provide the energy and building blocks of life, life cannot proceed without water. In India, the word *jeevan*, which signifies life also has water as one of its meaning (The Jeevan Bima Nigam is the Life Insurance Corporation and the Maharashtra Jeevan Pradhikaran is the drinking water authority in Maharashtra).

In India, water is much more significant because most of the country has a short, well-defined monsoon in which most of the rainfall occurs, and this has to last for the rest of the year. When the rain falls, how it falls, how much it falls, what it does to the streams is therefore something in which we are all deeply involved. These things are of deep concern, since the potential joy of good rainfall is often offset by the grief of a drought or a famine. These are things deeply embedded in the culture, in the folklore and the practices of the South Asian subcontinent.

In the subcontinent the oldest archaeological evidence of settled agriculture dates back almost 7000 years ago in the austere North-Western passes of the Himalayan and Hindukush ranges.[2] Settled agriculture spread throughout the subcontinent, but as a way of life it spread slowly – in retrospect much more slowly than is generally presumed, spreading not linearly, but spawning centres in favourable locations and spreading outward from those centres. The first indications of a prosperous agriculture are linked to water. The Indus valley was at the heart of the Harappan civilisation which stretches from the austere North-Western passes in the Himalayas right down to the south of the banks of the Narmada. The flood plains of the Indus, like those of the Nile, were a fertile tract, their fertility annually replenished by the bounty of the river. There is a lot of archaeological evidence to suggest that the Harappans were well versed in the simple technology of managing the annual floods in the plains. There is also evidence of wells, artesian wells and diversion channels. Water as we receive it is one thing, but water as we shape it to our needs is another, and in the Harappan civilisation we see the earliest evidence of the attempts to harness water to our purposes and needs. However, by the end of the Harappan period, there is palaeo-biological and palaeo-geological evidence of likely tectonic shifts and environmental changes. The climate over the entire area of the Harappan civilisation seems to have undergone a change, becoming more and more arid (Rajasthan, the area with many more Harappan sites than the Indus valley itself). There is evidence of now dried up palaeochannels of the earlier Ghaggar-Saraswati system which seemed to have dried up around then.

The proverbial last straw was provided by the gradual but steady influx of the Indo-Aryan speakers displaced from the Central Asian plains by the same factors. Their lifestyle was the opposite, a nomadic pastoral way of life in which agriculture was seasonal. For them water was essentially flowing water in the streams and any attempts to bind it (read: dam it) verged on the sacrilegious. There are references in which a battle is described between Indra and Vritra who had held the waters captive, and how Indra smashed the walls and freed the water that probably describes the conflict between the newly arrived pastoral tribes and the already arrived settlers. It would now be quite some time before the re-emergence of any kind of irrigation and settled agriculture in the Indo-Gangetic plains – and similarly a long time, almost 2500 BC, that we would again find the resurgence of cities, the Iron Age cities which were to give us the Buddha and Mahavira, The Lokayats and the Makhali Ghoshals.[3]

Meanwhile it is at the opposite end of the subcontinent in the South, in Tamil Nadu, that we can see the earliest evidences of irrigation systems that continue right into the present. The value that ancient Tamil Society put on water can be seen in one of the poems from the Sangam period reproduced below:

> Those who give food give life to all living beings,
> who cannot live without water.
> Food is first of all bodies made of food

> and food is but water and soil mixed,
> so those who unite water and soil
> create living bodies and life in this world.
> Even kings with vast domains
> strive in vain when the land is dry,
> when fields sown with seed
> must look to the sky for rain.
> So, Pandyan king, who makes dreadful war,
> do not disdain my words, expand quickly those watery places
> built where water moves across the land!
> For those who harness water
> harness rewards for themselves,
> and those who fail cannot endure.[4]

It is also in Tamil Nadu that we find the *etram*, the oldest mechanical device for drawing water for irrigation purposes. It is a simple lever operated sometimes by hand, but often simply by physically walking on the lever arm, which lifts water from a flowing stream and puts it into a channel at a somewhat higher level to be carried to the fields. This simple rugged device was admittedly limited in its capacity, it could only provide as much water as corresponded to the power a strong man could provide, but its persistence until a couple of decades ago when it was finally rendered extinct by the spread of electricity indicates how vital was the protective supplement of water it provided.[5] Tanks were the mainstay of the irrigation system and in spite of the disrepair they have fallen into, they continue to perform an important role in Tamil Nadu irrigation systems.[6] The oldest comprehensive account of the construction of tanks that we have is through the eyes of a woman. In the famous Silapadhikaram as we follow Kannagi in her travails as she goes about in search of her anklets and her lover, she comes across a village tank being constructed and her account gives a detailed picture of how the land is mapped out, the contours drawn and the tank finally built by the village.[7] The oldest witness we have for the oldest extant system of irrigation is therefore a woman.

WOMEN AND WATER: A CLOSE RELATIONSHIP

Women have always had a special relationship with water and nowhere so as in the South Asian subcontinent. Water is sacred, rivers are goddesses, each with their own unique stories and with their own virtues. *Apsaras or asaras* come down from heaven to 'live' their curses on earth and when they do so, they step out of rivers or flowing waters and return to them. The folklore of the Gokul of Shrikrishna revolves around the watering place and the women. All ablution involves water and all *puja-archa* involves water. Water is the purifier, in holy places it becomes *tirih*. In this context Anne Feldhaus has done an exhaustive study of the rivers in Maharashtra – and the different customs, rituals, symbols and myths associated with rivers and water bring out the 'femininity' of these. To quote:

> Thus, the rivers' names are grammatically feminine; stories make many of them liquefied women or put them in women's familial roles; offering made to them are those most appropriately made to a woman; when they are dressed, it is in women's clothes. In addition, a ritual rule hints that rivers are viewed as being psychologically female. The rule is found in Sanskrit legal literature, in connection with the idea that rivers menstruate in the rainy season – that the mud (*rajas*) that is carried down with their currents makes them menstruous (*rajasvala*). One should not bathe in them at this time, just as a man should not have intercourse with a menstruating woman.[8]

Culture in the subcontinent is steeped in such material. Together these stories, myths, rituals and customs stand witness to the close association that exists between water and women, their daily lives and daily practices. A fascinating area of exploration in itself, this is not, however the aspect on which we shall dwell in what follows. In what follows we shall mainly concentrate on the more material and tangible aspects of water – water as a means of living (drinking water and water for domestic use – washing, bathing, etc.) and as an instrument, means and condition of production (more specifically as irrigation).

WATER FOR DOMESTIC USE

Drinking water and water for domestic use have always been, and been seen as, women's responsibility. It is they who spend a large part of their lives in fetching and storing water. They spend an even greater part of their lives in utilising it – for cooking, for washing clothes and utensils, and cleaning floors, etc. Drinking water shortages hit them the hardest, increasing the time and effort they have to spend in fetching water, storing it and husbanding it through judicious use. Though it is taken for granted that women spend considerable amount of their time in seeing to the survival needs of the households, there are not many systematic studies that document and quantify this workload of women in different agro-climatic zones and regions with different resource endowments. In a study of the Konkan region of Maharashtra it was found that in every household, on an average, women spend about 1 hr 50 minutes each day in fetching and storing the water required to fulfil the domestic needs of the household. Comparatively, the time spent by men on the domestic water front is very negligible, about 10 minutes per day on an average. As percentages, the men account for about 7%, women for 79% and children for 14% of the time spent by the household in meeting its domestic water needs [See Table 1]. It also shows that fetching water accounts for almost 25% of the time women spend in tasks other than those they spend on housework (cooking, washing and other work inside the house). If this is the situation in a place like Konkan which has an average annual rainfall of more than 2500 mm then one could imagine the situation in semi-arid and arid regions where the average annual rainfall is around or below 500 mm.

In other studies, time spent on fetching water has not been separately reported, but the greater number of hours that women have to work in semi-arid areas probably indicate a greater number of hours spent on fetching water. For example, women in

Table 1
Labour spent by men, women and children per household on different tasks[9]

Item	Labour spent in hours/day/household			
	Men	Women	Children	Total
Labour spent on fetching water	0.17	1.83	0.32	2.32
	(7.39)	(78.95)	(13.66)	(100.00)
	{3.17}	{24.31}	{28.32}	{16.49}
Labour spent on grazing cattle	1.21	0.59	0.51	2.31
	(52.39)	(25.42)	(22.19)	(100.00)
	{22.39}	{7.81}	{45.87}	{16.45}
Labour spent on collecting fuel	0.32	0.64	0.07	1.03
	(30.71)	(62.40)	(6.89)	(100.00)
	{5.82}	{8.50}	{6.32}	{7.30}
Labour spent on agricultural tasks	2.55	3.66	0.17	6.38
	(39.94)	(57.35)	(2.71)	(100.00)
	{47.07}	{48.55}	{15.45}	{45.35}
Wage labour	1.17	0.82	0.05	2.03
	(57.50)	(40.27)	(2.23)	(100.00)
	{21.54}	{10.84}	{4.04}	{14.42}
Total	5.41	7.54	1.12	14.07
	(38.47)	(53.57)	(7.96)	(100.00)
	{100.00}	{100.00}	{100.00}	{100.00}

(Figures in parentheses represent labour spent on a particular task by a section as a percentage of the total labour spent by the household on that particular task. Figures in braces represent labour spent on a particular task by a section as a percentage of total time spent on all tasks by that section.)

Rajasthan have been reported to spend an average of up to 16 hours on all household tasks, including that of fetching water.[10] Here too we should take account of the seasonal and regional variation – the average probably hides severe overwork during the summer months. Fetching water is hard work and the degradation of the environment finds almost immediate expression in increasing non-availability of water and the increase in the burden of women. Padmini Swaminathan has documented the effect of women's work on their reproductive health.[11] As Wandia Seaforth of the UNCHS puts it,

> Medical research has documented cases of permanent damage to women's health attributed to carrying water. Problems range from chronic fatigue, spinal and pelvic deformities to effects on reproductive health such as spontaneous abortions. In some parts of Africa, where women expend as much as 85 per cent of their daily energy intake fetching water, the incidence of anaemia and other health

> problems are very high. Incidence and severity of anaemia increases during the dry season. It has also been determined that the nutritional level of children is negatively related to the distance the mother must walk for water.[12]

What Seaforth has pointed out above is closely related to the fact that water and access to water is one of the important determinants of the quality of life in the rural areas, especially for the rural poor. Almost everything that is related to the quality of life in rural areas is related to water. Hygiene, cleanliness and health are all dependent on the availability of, adequate access to and quality of water.

> ## HOW CARRYING WATER AFFECTS WOMEN'S HEALTH
>
> One of the aims of the Water Decade was to reduce the social, economic and health consequences of carrying water by providing a safe water supply within reasonable walking distance. Many projects have been developed, but few are concerned specifically with the health effects of carrying heavy loads of water over long distances.
>
> Women in many countries prefer buckets, tins or Jerry-cans to traditional containers such as calabashes and clay pots. The weight of an empty container varies between 500 g and 5 kg (1 and 10 pounds), depending on the material; plastic is the lightest. The average quantity of water held in a container ranges between about 12 and 25 litres (3 and 5 gallons). The most common method of carrying water is on the head, particularly in Africa. Women sometimes carry several containers, increasing the weight of the load to 50 kg (110 pounds). Carrying water on the head requires strength in the neck and considerable skill, a skill often acquired around nine years old.
>
> ### *General health effects*
>
> The task of carrying heavy loads over long distances requires a great deal of energy, which comes from metabolised food. The longer the distance and the more difficult the terrain, the greater the quantity of food needed. Women carrying water are frequently exposed to malnutrition, anaemia and water-related diseases.
>
> Women are most vulnerable to malnutrition at the end of the dry season when they have to travel even greater distances to fetch water. Women and children suffering from malnutrition are also more susceptible to other diseases.
>
> Some 230 million people are estimated to be anaemic, and pregnant women, in particular, are at risk. In Africa, 40 per cent of non-pregnant and 63 per cent of pregnant women are anaemic. During pregnancy, the arduous task of carrying water can cause problems with the growth of a foetus. Women have to resume fetching water soon after giving birth, which can affect the quantity and quality of breast milk, making the baby vulnerable to malnutrition. Women collecting water from certain environments may be exposed to water-related diseases such as malaria, filariasis and schistosomiasis.

Effects on the skeleton

Carrying heavy loads over long periods of time can result in damage to the vertebral column. In normal physiological conditions, the vertebral column is resistant and can support great strains, but this changes as people age. A major problem arising from carrying water is the early ageing of the vertebral column. This may be influenced by several factors, the most important of which is overwork. A hereditary factor may also exist in certain families, causing rheumatism.

Problems occur in the organic tissue: the disc decreases and becomes thinner. The nucleus becomes fibrous and no longer acts as a shock absorber. The vertebral bodies become more fragile and tend to change shape from rectangular to cuneiform. This may lead to a deformity called cyphosis.

At the same time, clinical symptoms appear in the form of pain, which increases with work, at the end of the day and in cold temperatures. Mobility often becomes limited: on waking up, considerable stretching is required before normal mobility can be achieved. As people move less because of pain, so their movements become more and more restricted until they may reach a stage where they cannot move at all. Because of modifications in physiological conditions, the vertebral column can no longer fulfil its functions.

Where children are concerned, the main problem associated with carrying heavy loads of water is the effect on the growth of bones. When children begin to carry water, they are still growing and a deformity known as scoliosis of the vertebral column may occur. Also, because of the development of the neck muscles, they may have problems with the thyroid gland. Other problems include fractures, slipped discs and damage to the knees.

(*Source:* Kerr, Charles (ed.), *Community Health and Sanitation,* London: Intermediate Technology Publications, 1990; available at www.technews.co.za/hippo/health.html

WOMEN FOR WATER; WATER FOR WOMEN

Women have participated in and spearheaded many struggles on the issue of drinking water. But what often happens is that women are seen as instruments to achieve goals set with respect to water. In the process, women's own needs and perspectives tend to be sidelined. As Sarah Ahmed has pointed out,

> In rural areas, women are almost exclusively responsible for collecting water for domestic purposes and for health and hygiene at the household and community level.[13] Water scarcity has a direct impact on the time that women (and girls) spend in water collection and hence, the time available for other work as well as on their access to water within the household.[14] Recognising women's multiple roles as providers of domestic water, as guardians of family health and as managers of water at the community level, water resource planners have increasingly sought to integrate women in water development initiatives.[15] However, despite the allocation of resources and the growing multiplicity of well intentioned statements, the rhetoric of women's participation overlooks the

> divergent needs and interests that rural women have in relation to water which are mediated by social relations of power at the household and community levels. In addition, bureaucratic organisations which are responsible for water management, are largely insensitive to the gender-differentiated needs and interests of water users or their capabilities as community water managers.[16]

WOMEN ARE NOT A HOMOGENEOUS CATEGORY

One must comprehend that women are not a homogeneous category. This is important because with the increasing emphasis on a 'gender component' there is an increasing tendency to see 'women' as an abstract homogeneous entity or an analytical category in various discourses, including those that claim a special relationship of 'women' with water, or for that matter, with all natural resources. In the overall context of patriarchy, and the juxtaposition of men and women as gender categories, this does have a certain validity. However, if it is de-contextualised, it hinders the understanding of how, under what conditions and to what extent, women actualise or negotiate this relationship. For this, we need to place women in the context of their other social relations in general and more specifically, in their caste and class positions in the Indian context.

This is important because unlike most other oppressed groups women are not segregated as a social group from men. Women face the consequences of being women as much as they face the consequences of belonging to the social section (class, caste, etc.) that 'their' menfolk belong to. This is as true with water. Though water is seen as a symbol of life, sacredness, etc., it is also a symbol of exclusion and segregation and is associated with purity and pollution taboos. In India, persons belonging to the erstwhile 'untouchable' castes could not touch or take water from the village 'common' water sources, a practice that unfortunately continues even today in certain parts of rural India. They had to wait at the watering source, waiting for a kindly *savarna* person to draw water from the well or the tank and fill their pot, that too from a safe distance. The *dalit*s have had to wage struggles around the issue of access to the village common water sources even in Independent India and later the issue of a single shared source, '*Ek Gaon Ek Panavatha*' (one village, one water source) became a social reform agenda in Maharashtra in the mid-70s. In the face of such a wide disparity in social position, it would be artificial to lump together the relation that the *dalit* and *savarna* women had with water.

WHICH SOURCES OF HISTORY DOES ONE RELY ON?

The tendency to take women out of their class and caste context in the discourse on the relationship between women and nature is related to how one theorises the relationship between women and nature. It requires the reexamination of dominant presuppositions of women's connections to nature. What are the sources of history that these dominant assumptions rely on? Almost invariably, these sources are texts such as the *vedas*, the *samhitas*, the *upanishads* and the *puranas*. As historical sources of information they have several drawbacks and biases built into them. Unfortunately, in writings about Indian tradition and history, most of the documents invoked to sustain the assumptions of dominant discourses about ancient India are of this type, and nothing can be more misleading, especially in connection with people's identities and natural resources. All these are Sanskrit texts accessible mainly to rich and learned men from higher castes. Moreover, they have been compiled and maintained by men from the higher castes, very often *brahmins*. Furthermore, except for the early vedic texts, almost all of them are philosophical and speculative, having much more to do with what *brahmins* thought the world was, or rather, ought to be like. This would have had very little to do with the actual situation of women in general, and of lower caste women in particular. Using these sources as the main source of historical material is to lose oneself in a speculative fog that obscures more than it shows. Take for example, the fact that *prakriti*, the category that comes closest to 'nature' is of feminine gender and is considered the feminine principle, and in some of the currents, is believed to be *pradhan* or principal in comparison with the *purush* principle. The leap that is often made from this straightforward philosophical discussion to conclusions about historical fact in respect of women's status and their relationship with nature is highly questionable. These leaps have bequeathed to us a construction that postulates a romantic and untroubled harmonious relationship between nature and women, and similarly between nature and tribal people. In these viewpoints, in a caste society such as it was in ancient India, with severe purity/pollution taboos, people's relationship with nature nevertheless does not seem to depend on their caste, strata and gender positions. As Brinda Rao puts it in her discussion of dominant constructs of women and nature as they appear in social science literature

> The general silence of the ancient texts about the lives of the common people has probably been responsible for creating the myth prevalent in many parts of India of the poor-but-happy tribal/marginal/rural woman whose impoverishment and abject poverty are compensated by her closeness to nature which everyone does not enjoy. Theorising women's relationship to nature demands that we first historicise these relationships.[17]

CONTEXTUALISING IS NOT FRAGMENTING

What exactly does historicising these relations mean? It means placing them within the context of their historical and social conjunctures, restoring the richness of contradiction of lived relationships to the decontextualised, abstracted entities that women are often reduced to. But this has its own pitfalls. One of the many ways in which this is done is to posit an unbridgeable divide between women belonging to different sections, especially to oppressor-oppressed moieties. An unbridgeable chasm opens up between women belonging to the leisured classes and women belonging to the toiling classes, women belonging to the *brahmin* castes and the women belonging to the *bahujan*, non-*brahmin* castes, between women of colour and white women. Contextualisation becomes an instrument of fragmentation.

In the process, relativism rules and the very basis of the women's movement, the commonness of women's oppression, disappears. In fact, the conclusion drawn from such hasty contextualisations often pre-empts a potentially significant conclusion. The starting point for this conclusion is the ubiquity of patriarchy; the fact that it pervades all sections, oppressors as well as the oppressed, and all types of oppression, for example, caste as well as class. What this can potentially mean is that women and the women's movement against their oppression can become a movement to end all oppression, if the different sections of women recognise the different forms of oppression of their sisters. No other movement against oppression has so far had this potential, the potential to be able to unite, and be in the forefront of, the different struggles against oppression. We shall keep this potential in mind in what follows. As we shall see a little later, the struggle for water as irrigation or as a means of production is closely linked to that of land. In the case of access to both land and water, women have always been incorporated at the margin; they have never been treated as part of the mainstream, whether in the context of land reform, or in the context of water sector reform. We shall return to this discussion later.

TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE: ONE STEP FORWARD, TWO STEPS BACK

One of the illustrations of the contradictory nature of the impact of technological change on women's lives was provided to us in the context of the setting up of a new drinking water system in a village. Earlier the village had the usual *panavatha*, the traditional water source, situated about one kilometre from the *gaothan*, the village settlement. Women had to trudge between the *gaothan* and the *panavatha* fetching drinking water and water for domestic use, and had to carry all the washing to the *panavatha*, wash it there and bring it back.

Under a drinking water programme the village was provided with an overhead tank and a tap in every home. It was a tremendous relief and a reduction in drudgery for the women in the village. But there were two associated effects which illustrate the peculiar 'one step forward two steps back' phenomenon that often characterises the impact of technological change on women's lives. The first was simply this – earlier the *panavatha* was a place where all the village women met, they could talk with each other, share problems, find solutions and make a space for themselves, safe from the intervention or interference of men. They now found that they had lost that space. Second, the old adage that housework expands to fill the time available came true. Since the women now had more time with the new water supply system in the village, they were then expected to do many more things for the household, things which they could not have earlier. So, while the drudgery of that particular task of fetching water was reduced, it did not mean a consequent reduction in the total burden of work they carried.

BACK TO THE DAWN OF CIVILISATION

This relation that women have had with technology goes back to the prehistoric, to the dawn of civilisation, to the emergence of settled agriculture itself. It is now fairly well established that women are the ones who discovered agriculture (in the sense of sowing and tending of plants) and while it was digging stick or hoe agriculture it seemed to have remained predominantly a women's preserve. Yet with the advent of plough agriculture women seem to have lost their pre-eminence in agriculture. There are two important factors in this transition, and it is difficult to hold any one of them solely responsible for this, there being every possibility that it is their combination that brought it about.

On the one hand we have a technological change, a change from an agriculture based on small, intensive plots tilled – in fact, it is better to say, nurtured – by hand to an agriculture based on relatively large pieces of land, tilled extensively with bullock power rather than intensively by hand. This, in fact, is one of the many moments of transition in history where technological progress has been accompanied by a distinct and often decisive shift from substantial participation or pre-eminence of women in certain occupations to a drastic reduction in their participation and control and a loss of pre-eminence. This can be identified in weaving and pottery-making a long way back in history but can also be seen today in many professions like tailoring. However, it would be incorrect to see technological change as the prime reason for the loss of participation. Patriarchy and capitalism have a role to play in this transition. Technology change makes control possible. To the extent that pre-transition crafts, professions, occupations were based on *metier* (hand skill along with individual knowledge), it was difficult to take over control because *metier* cannot be as easily transferred as technology. Technology change certainly created the potential for greater control, but there had to be patriarchy for that potential to be realised in the form of loss of participation and control for the women. This is even further accentuated by capitalism.[18]

TACKLING TECHNOLOGY

The important point here is not an argument against technology but that we need to be vigilant so far as the relation between technology and women is considered. This may be done first, by refraining from drawing hasty conclusions about the impact of a technology purely on the basis of the potential for women's well-being that a technology may exhibit; and secondly, by considering the social, economic and familial context in which the technology will operate. To return to the example that occasioned this detour, let us discuss this in the light of the change from *panavatha* and backbreaking labour to the individual tap in every home in the village that we were discussing. What the example shows are not the ill-effects of piped water technology, but the unexpected side effects that flow from the context within which the technology operates. To those who would pay attention to history this would not be unexpected: in spite of the immense potential that mechanisation has for lightening human labour, it had initially come as a labour intensifying device in the hands of capitalist firms, as anyone studying the conditions of the working classes in the later half of the nineteenth century may easily discover.

In the case of the women, it has not served to directly intensify the labour spent in fetching and storing water, but the nature and context of the technology have nevertheless mattered. The change from *panavatha* to individual tap has also been one from a social and interactive mode to a privatised, individual mode. The lesson is that the individual tap must be accompanied by activities that preserve the interactive space that women would otherwise lose. The second associated effect is due to the patriarchal context within which the technology operates. Time freed from fetching and storing water becomes extra time available, so even though women do save labour and drudgery on one task, there may not be an overall reduction in their drudgery. Countering this increase in drudgery involves an overall empowering of women within the household, taking us a fair distance from the whole question of drinking water that we started out from.

This apparent shift from a simple task of alleviating the situation regarding drinking water to the issue of general empowerment of women brings out the importance of situating technological problems within the social, economic and familial context within which the problems operate. What makes this shift appear so dramatic is that the task of effectively tackling women's problems is tied up so intimately with an improvement of their personal lives. While this has also been true of other social sections (for example, the working classes, especially as they emerged in the transition from feudal to capitalist societies, and in India, the *dalits* and the *bahujans*), with no other section does it appear so far removed from the social sphere as it does in the case of women. ('What, do you mean that now having a tap in my home is related to how much and what my wife will cook for us!?')

WOMEN'S 'ABSENCE' OUTSIDE DRINKING WATER

So far we have been discussing drinking water and water for domestic use – water as a means of living rather than water as a means of production. However, there is an implied generalisation about this that one often comes across in the literature on women and water. In fact the material available on women's relationship with applied water itself is very scanty; often it is subsumed under a much broader area of 'natural resource' and applied water is not specifically dealt with. Ecologist and feminist critics of development also do not dwell much on water, save for fleeting references in discussions of general issues such as drought and deforestation or the invisibility of women's work.[19] The often implicit, underlying assumption is that women had a better position *vis-á-vis* access to, and control over, water resources and participation in the traditional, community managed, local irrigation systems. This is quite plausible, but there does not seem to be much hard data to back such claims. For example, the literature available on the much talked about, widespread, traditional and community-managed irrigation systems like *phad* system in North Maharashtra[20] and the tank irrigation systems in South India[21] does not indicate such relationship. There could be two reasons for this: one, there is no such relationship on the ground; and two, no studies of these systems have been made from women's points of view. In the absence of such information, the argument relies on proxy: the significant role women seemed to have played in agriculture – pre-capitalist and primarily subsistence agriculture – that provided the context of traditional irrigation systems is taken as a proof of women's involvement in the management of these systems.[22] In most of the literature relating to natural resources, so far as women and drinking water or water for domestic use are concerned, there are voluminous references to women's role. However, as soon as we come to applied water or water for productive use, women are virtually absent and their 'presence' has often been theorised by proxy. This actually takes us to a more general issue of how women's role is visualised in respect of the spheres of production and reproduction.

'DOMESTIC' AND 'PRODUCTIVE' WATER USE, 'REPRODUCTION' AND 'PRODUCTION' SPHERES OF WOMEN

Water is seen primarily in terms of four types of uses, namely, drinking water use, agricultural use, industrial use and recreational use. There is a fifth use, ecosystem use (basically water used directly by the ecosystem or needed for the sustenance of the ecosystem itself, including the hydrological cycle), of which there is an increasing awareness, but which has not yet entered the thinking of the irrigation establishment. Drinking water is a category which accounts for water used in the domestic sector like water used for drinking, washing clothes and utensils, cooking, bathing and also for animals. Very often in the discussion about women's relationship with water it is this component of domestic water use that is associated with women. Water for productive use (both agricultural and industrial) is often seen as something out of bounds for women; exclusively a male domain.[23]

Domestic water becoming a women's prerogative is very much connected to the sexual division of labour arising from patriarchy. Feminist writings have pointed out gender as the basic factor in the division of labour; certain tasks, especially related to subsistence, were performed exclusively by women and female children in most parts of the world.[24] They have also shown how this gives rise to the dichotomy between reproduction (meaning domestic) and production (meaning economic) spheres and women primarily seen as engaged in the sphere of reproduction.[25] The sexual division of labour – signified not only by the different tasks and roles of men and women, but also by the differential worth accorded to them – exists within the household, or in the sphere of reproduction, and in production relations within a particular society as well as across different societies.[26] This type of a stereotype gets further strengthened as our policy makers are still guided by the 'domestic roles' of women and as a result women are made the primary targets of programmes like drinking water, sanitation, etc.

THE WATER CONTINUUM: DROUGHTS, DAMS AND IRRIGATED AGRICULTURE – THE COST WOMEN PAY

> *"All the taps are dry, the only ones running are my eyes –*
> *When I cry because the teacher scolds me for coming to school dirty …*
> *My sister also cries*
> *When I go to the school line*
> *And she goes to the water line …*
> *My mother also cries, yes my mother too, she cries*
> *When father shouts because he has no water to bathe …*
> *Or because she does not smell nice when he comes to bed …."*[27]

The above quote taken from a Swahili recitation by a 11 year old boy in Nairobi's Mathare Valley slum on World Water Day 1996 illustrates some of the hidden costs that women have to pay everyday for not having easy access to water. The (segment of the) poem by the late Dalit Marathi poet Daya Pawar, given at the beginning of this essay, poignantly brings out the more direct and obvious costs women pay. The drought and project affected the woman protagonist employed as a labourer building the same dam that would displace her speaks for womankind placed at the confluence of different points in the water continuum – droughts, dams and irrigated agriculture: the first, the absence of water; the second, the means and process of 'creation' of water; and the third, its use.

As discussed earlier, even in normal times women have to spend a significant proportion of their time in meeting basic household needs like domestic water, fodder and fuel. With drought and with the degradation of the ecosystem, women have to put in even more time, even more labour to collect less and less – both quantitatively and qualitatively – of water, fodder and fuel, and have to hire out even more of their labour for a smaller than usual wage. And then there are the other impacts – permanent and seasonal migration to cities and irrigated areas, apparent increase in the incidence of 'women-headed' households because of male out-migration, women losing control of land because of male out-migration, erosion of livelihoods and the resultant increase in time spent on wage labour by women (especially on government employment guarantee scheme sites), deterioration in health caused by lack of nourishment and increase in workloads, girl children dropping out of schools to share in the work burden, etc. These are all well known and as Brinda Rao says, 'studies agree that poor and marginal people who depend directly on nature for their subsistence are the hardest hit by ecological degradation. Since women in rural societies are primarily responsible for providing fuel, fodder and water for their households, lack of access to these resources increases both their already heavy workloads, as well as their impoverishment'.[28] In a patriarchal society, the effects of drought, and any kind of ecological degradation, are much more severe on women as compared to men. However, the same adversity of drought also offers an opportunity for women to come out of the 'domestic' sphere and break some of the social barriers that keep them secluded. The very adversity has also necessitated that they come together, attend meetings, and articulate their demands – for work, for wages, for water, for protection of the trees and environment, etc. – in an organised manner, and also that these issues become an important part of the agenda of the rural women's movements.[29]

Drought and famine have ravaged populations in India since ancient times and their frequency and scale have been on the increase in the recent past. For example, let us look at the toll that drought took in 2001: total villages affected, about 1,20,000; total population affected, around 160 million; total crop area affected, about 20.5 million ha; coverage, about 180 districts in the eight states of Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Orissa, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh; and the monsoon rainfall 59% to 18% below normal. One can also imagine the resultant shortages of drinking and domestic water, fodder and fuel and the increased burden on women.[30] Often drought is defined in terms of rainfall failure and the resultant deficiency in water availability and moisture stress and terms like 'meteorological drought', 'hydrological drought', and 'agricultural drought' are all examples of this. With such a narrow understanding two things happen; one, human intervention in the form of the overall mode of production, state policies and development packages as causative factors are missing from such definitions and debates; two, it becomes difficult to understand the differential impact drought has on different social sections, especially women. Hence there is a need to see 'drought' as a social event triggered by a "failure of rains". In systemic terms, when the quantum of rainfall in an area falls below a critical value, a number of socio-economic and ecological factors interact to produce a situation where the subsistence cycle (subsistence cycle implies income generating productive activities carried out for subsistence) of a large population in the area is severely disrupted.

The "drought-prone" ness is therefore essentially dependent on the socio-economic and ecological sub-systems characterising it. It arises out of the juxtaposition of and interaction between two distinct types of sub-systems: the ecological sub-system characterised by scarcity of water resources and an uncertain and variable rainfall pattern; and as importantly, a socio-economic sub-system characterised by the virtual absence or insignificance of non-agricultural incomes for an overwhelming majority of the population. The degree of sensitivity of this subsistence to the uncertainty and variability of the rainfall pattern then provides the basis and the criterion for classifying drought-prone areas.[31] Such an understanding of drought gives us the needed analytical tools to understand drought, its impact and coping mechanisms from a gender point of view. Such a framework also helps us to see how variables arising from patriarchy like sexual division of labour and relative absence of non-farm income opportunities for women as compared to men make women more vulnerable to droughts and famines.

The situation arising out of dams and displacement, is also somewhat similar to that of drought and its impact. The people are literally plucked out and placed in often hostile and alien socio-cultural environments and ecosystems. They are also not provided the mandatory facilities and compensation as envisaged in the rehabilitation packages, except may be in places where there are organised struggles of the oustees. Women oustees have been in the forefront of all such struggles. In fact the different issues and problems related to dam oustees (to use a more formal term 'project affected persons' – PAPs) have been brought out by the different dam oustees' movements, especially in the last decade or so, and also have become subjects of popular writings.[32] The main lacuna is that there has not been any systematic study of displacement and its impact from a gender point of view. However the main difference between drought and displacement due to dams is that in the case of the latter it is a direct result of the nature of human intervention and the dominant paradigm of development. Construction of large dams is seen as the only way to combat droughts, water scarcity and to increase agricultural production, irrespective of the fact that the very same process is throwing out certain social sections out of the developmental process itself – all justified, to borrow a term from Arundhati Roy, for the 'greater common good'.

The point is not whether we need large dams or not; but how do we manage our water sources and who benefits and who loses. Though there are alternative ways of handling large sources, the dominant view still is to store the entire water behind one large dam, causing destructive submergence and displacement. The scales are so large that the issue of rehabilitation becomes intractable. In fact there is also a division taking place that almost always coincides with the divisions between advantaged and disadvantaged social groups, and in a majority of cases between *adivasis* and non-*adivasis*. It pits one against the other – project affected *adivasis* versus the so-called beneficiary non *adivasis*, or the drought affected versus the project affected. In this process the women also have to stand against one another – the project affected *adivasi* women versus the drought affected non-*adivasi* women. In fact when we talk about dams and displacement in the context of women we have also to see the context of *adivasi* women. We have to look for ways in which the apparent conflict of interest between drought affected and project affected can be reconciled.[33] In fact we should realise that both drought- and dam-based displacement play havoc in the lives of people, and result in the violent disruption of livelihoods, throwing large sections of the people into poverty and below subsistence existence. There is nothing to choose between the two. Both are ecological and developmental refugees and in the present context women, that too from the vulnerable social sections like *adivasis* and *dalits*, occupy the lowest rung even here.

Coming to the use of water in agriculture, we find that there are a number of studies and documentation of the impact of irrigated agriculture (capitalist agriculture, monocultural agriculture, external input-based agriculture, commercial or market oriented agriculture, green revolution agriculture – or whatever term we may use) on women. This issue has been looked at from various angles – changes in the role of women in agriculture, impact on food security and nutrition, traditional sources of women's income, deskilling of women, increases in workload, exploitation, health, domestic violence and desertion, dependence on the market even to meet basic needs because of commodification, decreasing control of women on land, water, other inputs and also on cash.[34] The literature available on irrigated agriculture and women indicates that women have been at the losing end except in cases where conscious efforts were put in by organisations and NGOs.[35] Studies on the impact of the Green Revolution have shown that technological change can generate major social benefits. At the same time it also generates significant costs for particular categories of rural women that are different in kind and in intensity from those experienced by men. For example, the introduction of high-yielding varieties of rice in Asia has had a major impact on rural women's work and employment, most of it unfavourable, by:

- increasing the need for cash incomes in rural households to cover the costs of technological inputs which has forced women to work as agricultural labourers;
- increasing the need for unpaid female labour for farming tasks thereby augmenting women's already high labour burden;
- displacing women's wage-earning opportunities through mechanisation.[36]

INITIATIVES AND EXPERIENCES

Toiling women have been in the forefront of struggles and movements for the protection and conservation of natural resources, against drought, against displacement, etc. The most well-publicised of these is the *Chipko* movement which has mainly been sustained by women's overwhelming participation. So much so the question is asked whether it is a women's movement or an environment movement. The women's response, "What do the forests bear? Soil, water and pure air. Soil, water and pure air sustain the earth and all she bears" brings out women's understanding of the interrelationship between forest, eco-system and livelihoods.[37] Apart from well-known examples like the *Chipko* movement and the *Narmada Bachao Andolan*, women's participation has been significant in many other movements ranging from the Bodhgaya struggle in Bihar for women's land rights[38] and the anti-drought movement spearheaded by Mukti Sangharsh and Stri Mukti Sangharsh in Sangli district of Maharashtra.[39] In the last 10 to 15 years, there has also been significant women's participation in NGO efforts that have attempted to deal with the issue of women and water in a more targeted, projectised mode.

A NOVEL PROTEST
NO SEX UNTIL WATER, SAY TURKISH WOMEN!

> A group of women in southern Turkey have banished their husbands from the bedroom in a protest against the lack of running water in their village, a local official said on Tuesday.
>
> A few dozen women have boycotted sex for about a month in an effort to force their husbands to build a drinking water system in the village of Sirt, near the Mediterranean resort of Antalya, local governor Mehmet Carparz said.
>
> Sirt's husbands have appealed to authorities to provide pipes and other material, saying they will donate their labour to expedite the system's construction, Carpaz said.
>
> "The men came to us and said, 'Please help us, please understand our situation'," he said.
>
> (*Source:* News item in the Indian Express, 15 August 2001.)

We give below a few selected cases of such efforts. These are neither exhaustive nor comprehensive. What we attempt through these case studies is to bring forward the spectrum of issues as clearly as possible.

Women's Participation in PIM – A Case from Orissa[40]

According to a study conducted by J.B. Patel and B.N. Sadangi of Orissa University of Agriculture and Technology, in Bhubaneswar, 23% of farm women (includes self-cultivating women and women as agricultural labourers) participate in irrigation management in Orissa. Women's contribution is not only through physical labour but also through active participation in decision making. Planning and execution of agriculture operations are a joint responsibility of both the spouses. Moreover, in Orissa women have apparently been granted joint ownership of lands in the name of their husbands. Also, studies by agricultural scientists show that women's contribution to agriculture ranges from 30 to 70 per cent depending on crops. Thus there is a legal, economic and social basis for women's participation in mainstream irrigation management.

Participatory irrigation management (PIM) was adopted as state policy in Orissa in 1995 and now targets the 'turn-over' of 150,000 ha to WUAs (water users' association) by 2002. In four irrigation commands covering about 21,000 ha, a total of 50 WUAs have been organised. Without any special effort to enrol women members, 6% of the total enrolled members are women. Women are also members of the executive committees of some WUAs. The potential for women's participation if certain affirmative actions are taken is clearly evident in the case of one WUA in Aunli command, in Angul district, where women constitute 67% of the membership, and the Executive Committee of the WUA is entirely female. According to Dalwai 'this did not happen through any special organising effort; rather it can be attributed to the lack of response by the men to organisers' suggestions for forming a WUA'. As mentioned earlier, this case 'highlights the potential, and perhaps the necessity, for going beyond the symbolic and including women. Water being a critical input in agriculture production, who decides its use is of significance from the view point of equitability'.

However if women have to be recognised as stakeholders in agriculture (their role in production sphere) and as equal partners in the organisation and management of WUAs in a patriarchal society, conscious intervention will be needed. Dalwai lists some of these as follows:

- At the state level, women should be accorded legal rights to joint tenancy on land originating with their husbands.
- By-laws can enable the spouse to become a member even when the land is recorded in his/her partner's name.
- Make at least 33% of the required number of membership to be women as a condition for WUA registration.
- Likewise ensure their role as office bearers through a mechanism of reservation.
- Sensitise the organisers – both government and non-government agencies – handling PIM.
- Emphasise women's role during the initial organising of the association.

Women's Movement for Access to Safe and Assured Drinking Water: Utthan-Mahiti Initiative in Bhal in Gujarat[41]

The efforts of Utthan, a Non-Governmental Organisation working in Gujarat, saw the emergence of a community based group called Mahiti, in Bhal. Bhal is situated near the Rann of Kutch where scanty rainfall combined with salinity creates a severe drinking water problem. Together, these organisations were able to initiate a women's movement in Bhal around the issue of access to safe and assured supply of drinking water. In fact the movement was able to pressurise the authorities, Gujarat Water Supply and Sewerage Board (GWSSB), to approve a project that sought to promote decentralised rain water harvesting structures such as plastic lined ponds, roof water collection tanks, etc., in the area. This is an interesting case in which women could force the GWSSB to go beyond its accepted, conventional approach to solving drinking water problems by bringing water through pipelines from far away sources.

The Mahiti-Utthan experience also shows that once women acquire a stake, they participate in and take the lead in defending water sources. A plastic lined pond was constructed in 1988 in the village Raisangadh and a committee was set up to manage this new resource. In 1996 the village had good rains and both the ponds in Raisangadh – the natural pond and the plastic lined one – were full at the beginning of November. However Cher, a neighbouring village 6 km away, consisting solely of the Darbar caste, with considerable political clout, dealing in money lending and often resorting to violence, was not so fortunate. Cher had never participated in the processes initiated by Utthan-Mahiti. When drinking water sources started to dry up in Cher, they approached Raisangadh for help. The Raisangadh community responded positively and suggested that they could draw water from the natural pond for domestic use and from the lined pond only for drinking water purposes, and that Cher should draw water and transport it only in wooden barrels by bullock cart. However, the villagers from Cher were not agreeable and, using their political clout, managed to get an authorisation from the district administration to take water from the plastic lined pond. They bought a diesel pump and connected it to an old broken pipeline of the GWSSB that led to Cher. As the water level in the lined pond dipped, the women of Raisangadh grew worried and a group of about eighty women belonging to the savings and credit groups of the village decided to confront the situation. They drafted a memorandum and stormed the office of the block administrator, and "forced" him to issue another letter asking the village Cher to stop drawing water, and to remove the pump with immediate effect. Cher withdrew. The incident indicates what women's coming together as a vibrant group could achieve once they came to own a resource through their activity.

Women's Involvement in Tank Rehabilitation – Initiative by Gram Vikas and Grameen Mahila Okkuta in Kolar District of Karnataka[42]

Kolar district has about 4,500 old tanks, traditionally maintained through royal patronage and participation of water users. However, with independence, the earlier system of maintenance collapsed. The sluices got choked, the storage area and the inlets silted up and the tanks lost more than 50 percent of their storage capacity, affecting paddy and sugarcane cultivation and the availability of water for drinking. Reportedly, over 61 per cent of all women are seriously affected by the seasonal unavailability of water. According to M.S. Jayalakshmi, Project Co-ordinator for Grama Vikas, "The squandering of common natural resources in this area is definitely the result of the marginalisation of women who have a stake in conserving such resources". Hence Grama Vikas decided on rejuvenation of tanks by involving women and since 1981 built up a network of about 4,000 women in Kolar district under the Grameen Mahila Okkuta (Rural Women's Group) to pressurise the government into repairing and desilting the tanks, and this has shown remarkable results particularly in the Mulbagal area of Kolar district. The Federation is not shy to resort to agitational means to get its demands accepted by the State Government. The women are also involved in all aspects of the rehabilitation of tanks and in the words of Jayalakshmi, "Beginning from generating proposals for raising loans for desilting, to budgeting and implementation, women were in complete charge".

Hirvi Dharthi, Stri Shakti – Women's Participation in the Anti-drought and Equitable Water Distribution Movement in Southern Maharashtra[43]

Mukti Sangharsh Movement (MSM) which spearheaded the anti-drought movement in Southern Maharashtra had its origins in the efforts to mobilise rural support for the famous Mumbai textile workers' strike in the early 80s. As the strike continued, many of the striking workers came back to the villages and, because of drought, had to work on the EGS sites. MSM tried to organise the EGS workers. Women outnumbered men in most of the EGS sites and, along with the textile workers, women formed the militant backbone of the struggles. Stri Mukti Sangharsh emerged almost spontaneously, first as an articulate stream within the Mukti Sangharsh Movement and by 1985, as an autonomous women's organisation. The women (along with the men) also refused to break stones at the EGS works since they would not have any impact on drought mitigation. Instead, they demanded agriculturally productive work. Women actively participated in various studies and surveys and in drawing up village-wise plans for soil and water conservation to be taken up under EGS. Thus, SMS also built in a very strong environmental content into its programmes and struggles making '*Hirvi Dharthi, Stri Shakti*' (Green Earth and Women's Power) an important slogan of the movement.

The highpoint of MSM has been the struggle around commercial excavation of sand by sand contractors from the Yerala river, a tributary of the Krishna, and the construction of the famous people's dam, the 'Baliraja'. When MSM first took up the issue it brought out the contrasting reactions of men and women. While men were more concerned about the immediate gains of better wages on sand excavation work (men got daily incomes of up to Rs. 150 to Rs. 200 as compared to the prevailing agricultural wages of about Rs. 40), the women could see the short and long term adverse impact – the extra cash would be spent on alcohol and the water table would go down. In fact, country liquor joints had mushroomed in the villages along the river Yerala and doctors also thrived. So when it was proposed that commercial sand excavation by the contractors be stopped, and that people control and use the sand judiciously to raise funds for the building of a dam to mitigate drought, women wholeheartedly supported it. The Baliraja Dam emerged from this historic struggle. Women were in the forefront of this militant struggle lasting for about two years that involved both agitation and construction work. Today the 100 metre long and 5 metre high dam on the Yerala between Balawadi and Tandulwadi stands as a symbol of the resolve and efforts of the toiling people, especially the women, to find sustainable solutions for drought eradication.

The people, with the help of activists and experts, also evolved certain norms for water distribution and water use. First, each member in a household would get one share, whether the household owned land or not, so the water right was dissociated from landholding. Second, priorities for water were set: first priority for water for domestic use, second for cattle, and third for nursery raising, planting of trees, agricultural use, etc. Since the available water was limited there was an attempt to develop a suitable cropping and land use pattern. In fact some of the so-called women-centred needs like domestic water, fodder, fuel, etc., were built into the water-land use priorities. None of this was smooth. There were two kinds of opposition: one, to the general principle of equity, especially from larger landholders; and two, to a water share for women from some of the men. To counter the first, MSM argued that water is a common property resource, so everybody should have an equal share. Secondly, it also said that the water stored in Baliraja Dam was a new resource created by everybody's participation and hence everybody should have access to it. To counter the second opposition from its own male ranks – it used a two-pronged approach. One, it placed the whole conflict of interests within the wider context of radical social change in which all immediate short term benefits are also steps towards the creation of a new society in which exploitation and oppression based on class, caste and gender would be abolished. Two, the role played by women both in the struggles and in the construction of the dam made them eligible for their share of water. MSM encouraged deserted women and other poor women from both villages collectively to take up a nursery programme under the Kisan Rop Vatika programme of the government, using the water from Baliraja dam. However, because of non-availability of resources to complete the construction and the water distribution system, the plan has been implemented only partially. Of course, the dam helped to increase the water availability in both the villages and there has been no domestic water shortage. Most of the households from one village could plant a second *rabi* crop.

More importantly, the contribution of MSM and the Baliraja Dam struggle lies in the multiplier effect it has had on the rural socio-political scene of Maharashtra. It articulated a basin-wide drought eradication programme based on three principles – integration of local and exogenous water, equitable water distribution and sustainable and regenerative use. The movement whose demand for equitable water distribution was first termed as 'asking for the moon' has now spread to about 13 talukas in the Krishna basin and thousands of toiling men and women are getting organised through the demand for equitable access to water. In the late 1980s it was because of SMS that the Stri Mukti Sampark Samiti (a co-ordination committee of women's organisations in Maharashtra) that earlier concentrated mainly on urban issues took serious note of access to water and other natural resources. And the Fifty-one Point Common Minimum Programme of the current coalition government in Maharashtra mentions equitable water distribution as its first point. However, women's access to water remains largely notional. Women count simply as members of the household and household is still the social unit used by the movement in its negotiation of water rights. So women's interests are merged or equated with that of the household.

Campaigning for Drinking Water – SEWA's Initiative in Gujarat[44]

"If the villagers of Gokhantar in the arid deserts of western Gujarat state have a supply of sweet water today they have their womenfolk to thank for it", says Reema Nanavati of the Self-employed Women's Association (SEWA). SEWA of Ahmedabad, established in the early 1970s, is today an internationally recognised trade union representing the interests of women working in the informal sector. The uniqueness of SEWA is that it has gone beyond mere economic empowerment of women, and has developed in its members the leadership capacities to take up issues that encompass poor women's lives such as health and water. SEWA's concerted campaign to enhance its membership in rural areas through identification of the most critical issue which affected women's lives showed that water is the most important livelihood issue which cuts across caste and class lines. Thus, the mobilisation for water was integrated into SEWA's work on natural resources management through its state level 'Women, Water and Work Campaign' whose objectives were:

- to raise women's awareness about water problems and their possible solutions
- to enable women to establish and maintain community water resources
- to support them in their negotiations with the government at all levels through capacity building and strengthening of local leadership.

Over the years the campaign has spread to nine districts and enrolled more than 30,000 members. During discussions regarding water, the women identify the nature of the water problem, the associated problems (health problems, water logging, etc.), the short and long term alternatives, and the strategies to achieve these. The idea is, the campaign is not merely a project or programme but a movement – which needs sustained people's involvement and the development of women's leadership.

The cases of Rupgarh village in Ahmedabad district and Kharati village in Kheda district are illustrative of how SEWA could mobilise the women of the villages to solve their drinking water problems. In both the cases the existing drinking water sources had become saline giving rise to various types of health problems. Women were convinced that 'salty water is equivalent to no water' and they forced the authorities to provide drinking water to these villages from sweet water sources through pipelines. There are many more such experiences and cases in Gujarat with regard to the participation of women and drinking water representing different social settings and different issues. Sudarshan Iyengar has documented six cases where women took the initiative in response to drought and drinking water shortages. In Lakhanka village in Surendranagar district the improvement of the existing drinking water facility was the issue. However there was the caste system and Harijans in the village were not allowed to take water from the source. But after women took the initiative in improving the system, the Harijans in the village also got access to water. In Dhrufania village in Bhavnagar it was the question of energy for bore wells. In Khari village in Kutch district the problem was of saline water. In Hamapar village in Bhavnagar district the women had to work on conflict resolution. There used to be theft of drinking water at night through underground pipes (by bribing the father-in-law of the *Sarpanch*) and diverting this water for irrigation. Women kept night vigils and exposed the whole racket, putting a stop to water theft. The women have also evolved new institutional forms like widening the scope of SHGs to include drinking water, or forming new water committees. Iyengar argues that the entire management of drinking water should be entrusted to women and they should be left to decide about the organisational form.

Women's Access to Water for Production: The Khudawadi Experience[45]

Khudawadi village in the drought-prone Usmanabad district in Marathwada is situated at the tail end of the Bori Medium Irrigation Project. It never received its share of water till a water users' association (WUA) was formed in the village around 1995–1996. In fact this 'deprivation' of not getting water irrespective of being within the command was the driving force for the people to come together, form the WUA, and take over the water distribution and management. The Society for Promoting Participative Eco-system Management (SOPPECOM), a non-governmental organisation which has done pioneering work in PIM in Maharashtra, helped the local people to establish the WUA. During the initial discussions with SOPPECOM when setting up the WUA, the Khudawadi WUA agreed to earmark 15% of the water they would receive from the Irrigation Department for the landless and women in the village. Along with this was the question of what the landless and women would do with the water, if they did not have land. One option was to make available the private wasteland, nearly 100 ha, from which the owners do not get anything much. Six owners of about 10 ha of contiguous wasteland, though initially reluctant and apprehensive of losing ownership, agreed to lease their wasteland for 15 years to the landless and women's group. It was decided that the land owners and the women's group would enter into a produce sharing arrangement under which 40% of the produce would go to the land owners, 40% would go to the women and 20% would remain with the women's group (Paryayi Vikas Sanstha – PVS) as a collective fund. The women took up various activities like nursery, soil and water conservation, planting and maintenance of trees, soil development and *in situ* composting, cultivation of different crops on small plots, setting up a water system for both the small plots and the wasteland.

The programme also had other spin-off effects. One, the women started a Self Help Group (SHG) which met some of their credit needs and brought the women together as a cohesive group. In fact these women formed the nucleus of the PVS. The women collectively took up a goat rearing scheme under the Integrated Rural development Programme (IRDP) based on fodder from the 10 ha wasteland – as a result of the soil and water conservation works and protection from open grazing – and now own Rs. 1 lakh worth of goats, and 1 acre of agricultural land (which they bought) and a permanent shed for the goats, and are also repaying the loan regularly. Here access to water was the starting point.

Women Irrigators and Participatory Irrigation Management: The Experience of Aga Khan Rural Support Programme in Gujarat[46]

Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP) was initiated in 1983 in Gujarat. It works on various issues related to natural resource management, ranging from community forestry, agriculture development, soil and water conservation in micro-watersheds, water resource development including lift irrigation, canal irrigation, ground water recharge and drinking water, biogas, savings and credit, collective agriculture input supply and marketing of agriculture produce. AKRSP has a programme reach of around 350 villages spread across the three districts of Bharuch, Surendranagar and Junagadh. AKRSP got involved in the PIM process in the state from 1990 and took up 6 of the 13 pilot schemes initiated in the state. Its involvement in PIM had three major components: (1) organising farmers into irrigation co-operatives for management of water and the irrigation infrastructure; (2) technical rehabilitation of the system with participation of farmers; and (3) policy advocacy. Because of a firm commitment to gender issues, the organisation took special care in sensitising its own staff to gender issues; made conscious efforts to internalise and incorporate gender concerns in its projects; and also became part of a wider network of NGOs working on women's issues. In this process it also tried to counter some of the popular arguments against women's participation in irrigation management such as (1) "One should only involve women if they have the knowledge and skills to further the objective of particular development projects, but not just for the cause of women"; (2) "When within PIM, transferring the focus of control from the bureaucracy to 'farmers' itself is difficult, then why not concentrate on that rather than add another dimension of gender equity?"; or (3) "Let PIM with 'farmers' communities stabilise first, then one can start looking at the class/caste/gender equity issues, as was done earlier with JFM".

AKRSP through using some of the PRA and other participatory techniques found that out of the 11 agricultural operations men had full responsibility for three activities (ploughing, application of pesticides and buying and marketing animals), and women for two activities (bringing water for pesticide application and seed storage). Activities like harvesting, threshing, winnowing, land preparation, had equal participation from both. Thus women also participate equally with men in the different farm operations and hence women also have to be called farmers. Similar exercises were carried out in relation to irrigation water management. If women played an equal role both in agricultural and irrigation activities, then the women should have been part of the decision making on these matters. However, when it came to decision making, men took all the decisions with regard to the formation of the WUA, the water charges, share fee rates and the crops to be taken with irrigation water.

AKRSP also found that canal water had six different uses – not only to irrigate crops, but also to water animals, to wash clothes, to bathe, to wash vessels and to 'mud' the house. Women used canal water for all these six uses, whereas men used it only for two uses (to irrigate crops and to bathe). It also showed that women's use of canal water extended beyond the 'productive' to the 'reproductive', whereas the men's role remained exclusively in the productive arena. Therefore for the participation of women in the WUA, the interpretation of water use could not be restricted to irrigation alone.

It was only after 1994-95 that efforts were made to critically look at the PIM experience from a gender perspective, but not much progress was made. In 1997–98 a new project was handed over to AKRSP for community organisation and technical rehabilitation. Women's participation in the WUA – in terms of representation in the general body as well as the management committee – on an equal footing with men was made an agenda item right from the beginning. Though by government rules women could become members of the WUA only if they owned land, landless women were enrolled as nominal members. Women participate equally in all forums of decision making – from attending village level meetings to that of attending meetings with the staff of the irrigation department. Table 2 gives details of the WUAs promoted by AKRSP.

From its practical experience of involving women in PIM processes, AKRSP has made some suggestions to further women's participation:

1. Women's involvement in irrigation starts with challenging the NGO's own perceptions:

    - Conceptual clarity within the organisation
    - Staff training on gender sensitisation is very important

Table 2
Organisation details of PIM Societies (WUAs) promoted by AKRSP

Name of project	Year of project	Total area irrigated (ha)	Total villages	No. of members			No. of cmt. members		
				M	F	T	M	F	T
Chopadvav	1992	536	20				19	0	19
Lakhi	1993	358	4	100	31	131	10	3	13
Isar	1995	354	3	262	36	289	11	0	11
N.Kakadiamba	1995	798	14				11	4	15
Kevdi	1999	507	7	210	210	420	13	13 1	26

Data as on June 2000; Source: Vasavada (See bibliography)

  - Experimenting with the changed understanding on a small scale, thereby gaining experience for involving women in irrigation
  - Experience through learning from others

2. Women's involvement in PIM should be from the very beginning and not as an add-on at a later stage.
3. NGOs should venture beyond mere legalities: to do what village men and women say.
4. To encourage women's participation in PIM, it is not only men who have to be convinced; women also have to be convinced.
5. Women need a forum of their own as a support system for the canal society – perhaps in the form of Mahila Mandals in the PIM command area.
6. Addressing the practical needs of women makes it easier to seek participation of women in PIM.
7. Women's participation in PIM not only increased efficiency but also led to the empowerment of women.

The organisation has realised that to strengthen and replicate women's participation, and to take account of women's concerns in water management, it is required that (a) land rights be de-linked from membership and voting rights and (b) gender concerns be made part of state government resolutions rather than merely the bylaws.

Role of Women in Co-operative Lift Irrigation Schemes: Sadguru's Efforts in the Tribal Areas[47]

Sadguru began its work in the mid seventies in the tribal and drought prone district of Panchmahals in Gujarat, supported mainly by the Mafatlal group of companies. Over the last 25 years or so it has spread its work to the neighbouring districts of southern Rajasthan and western Madhya Pradesh. The focus of their work has been 'to improve water and land management practices in tribal communities, so as to ensure a more sustainable natural resource base and a better quality of life for the local population through the reduction of high levels of distress migration'. Sadguru used water as the main 'entry point' for its development work. The main activities were construction of check dams to harness the local rain water and installation of lift irrigation schemes. People could then take two and sometimes even three crops (including cash crops) in place of the one rain-fed subsistence crop. The assured irrigation also improved employment opportunities in the villages, raised the income levels and helped to lower distress migration – often induced by drought conditions – especially amongst the women. Sadguru also helped to set up institutions to manage community infrastructure such as the lift irrigation schemes and also to provide services to the local people (through credit societies, women's groups, youth groups, etc.). Women have been particularly encouraged to participate in these institutions.

In fact there have been conscious efforts within the organisation to bring in gender sensitivity among its staff, extension workers and community volunteers. It is reported that nearly 33 per cent of its staff members are women, and 50 per cent of its department heads and one of its co-directors are also women. Of the total of 342 honorary village workers, nearly 40% are female and all the agricultural extension workers are women. As part of its initiative to give women decision-making power, Sadguru also insists that 50 per cent of the seats on the executive committees of village forest institutions are held by women. Sadguru's concern for gender equality can also be seen from its campaign, along with other NGOs, to change the Gujarat state co-operative laws which recognise only landholders (meaning male heads) as members of lift irrigation co-operative societies. In 1996 the law was amended to make it mandatory for these societies to have three women members (one-third representation) on their executive committees.

Sara Ahmed has done a very detailed study of three Lift Irrigation Schemes set up by Sadguru in Bambela and Ranyar (kanbi) villages. Both are predominantly Bhil villages. Apart from the socio-economic impact these schemes have made in the lives of both the men and women of these villages, the study also brings out the positive impact of the participation of women in these schemes and in conflict resolution (the most common conflict situation is when some members take water out of turn), collection of water tariff, enforcing rules, etc. It has also changed the women's status or their own self-images. As Harsighbhai, Secretary of a LIC puts it, "Earlier our women would never talk to strangers, they would withdraw inside the house....But now they are curious – they come out to see who is visiting and why. Their participation in the committees has made them stronger and given them greater self-confidence".

One of the ways to find out the efficacy of such strategies to bring women's issues, concerns and participation into the development process is to see whether there has been any change in the sexual division of labour. Sadguru did such an exercise in the participatory mode during a training programme attended by both men and women. They tried to capture the impressions of the participants of the impact of development intervention on gender roles in household work, agriculture work and social and community activities. The findings of a participatory exercise to investigate the change in gender roles carried out by Sadguru (see Table 3), shows that there has been a significant increase in the number of days spent by men in domestic work. Of course the table also shows that the workload of women has increased, as there has been an increase in the time spent by women in agriculture and other social and community activities. This is also a trend that we see in other places, as increase in the workload, especially of the women, is a concomitant of irrigated agriculture and its spin off effects on agro-based diversification.

Table 3
Changing sexual division of labour (in terms of number of days in a year)

Type of work	Before intervention		After intervention	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Household work	50	130	150	214
Agriculture work	77	68	168	160
Social & community work	118	58	168	144

Source: Ahmed 1999 (See bibliography)

REFLECTING ON THE EXPERIENCE

The initiatives and experiences described briefly here bring out the range of issues that comprise all the work done in the area of women and water. However these efforts, while they have been successful in many ways, remain partial. We may remark here on the need for a closer linkage between the women's movement as a whole and the considerable work being done on issues related to women and water. These struggles and the considerable experience they have generated tend to remain isolated in the absence of a live connection with mainstream women's movements. The women's movement needs to assimilate this experience critically, generalise it and nurture multiple centres of grassroots activities on these issues. There are signs that there is a growing awareness of the need for such two-way traffic.

The experiences that we have described also show that while drinking water remains very closely tied to women's participation, there is a potential for women to go beyond the issue of drinking water and move on to issues related to more and more aspects of their lives, whether it is health, watershed activity, common properties, infrastructure like road, livelihood issues – there is scope for women to take the lead in the affairs of the village provided the organisations are aware of this potential and make full use of it.

Similar is the question of agency. Organisations need to be aware of the potential of various institutional and organisational forms. For example, much of NGO activity is related to women's SHGs and SHGs are routinely conceived of and widely replicated as credit instruments. It is important to realise that credit may be a starting point and an immediate occasion for women to come together, but it can also become an instrument of strengthening women's presence in village affairs in general. Unless women have a strong presence in village affairs, positive discriminatory action in favour of women is unlikely to emerge – at best there will be passive tolerance of women's activities. This is especially critical when women's activities begin to encroach upon men's preserves, especially in relation to land and water. The experience of women's intensive cultivation on small plots shows that these small parcels of land can make a significant contribution to improving women's positions – provided they are assured of limited but definite quantities of water.

The experience of the women in Khudawadi is an example of the positive direction that is needed. In spite of its limited achievements it shows how to increase the availability of water (and local natural resources in general), and to secure at least a minimum water and land assurance for the women. Therefore two directions emerge: one, creating a strong presence for women in village affairs in general and moving on to issues of women's share in economic activity and property. Here we should note that there may be a need to go beyond the small plot strategy of Khudawadi to a Bodhgaya style of access to land or to the Orissa type of joint ownership and participation in irrigation.

Ultimately what is important is assurance of livelihood and that of water as a means of that livelihood. Women are the largest property-less stratum, considering that even in propertied households women are either excluded from that property or are effectively deprived of access to and control over it in most cases. While there is an increasing and welcome attention being paid to improving women's conditions, it must also be said that the rate of change brought about in substantive matters related to their existence is dismally low. As we see it there can be no livelihood assurance for women in the rural areas until they, along with other disadvantaged sections, acquire real and effective access to the basic means of production, namely, land as well as water.

WOMEN AND WATER: PART OF A WIDER MOVEMENT FOR A SUSTAINABLE AND EQUITABLE RESTRUCTURING OF THE WATER SECTOR

Our basic premise is that the question of women and water (in terms of access, control and participation in its management) has to be addressed in the wider context of restructuring the water sector in more equitable and sustainable lines. At present the water sector is in a deep crisis and the way in which we find a solution out of it will, to a great extent, mould the future women–water relationship. In that sense it does not remain only a women's issue. Though we cannot go into details, below we discuss a few of these issues.

Privatisation or user control?

There are far-reaching changes that are taking place in the water sector and the impact of globalisation and privatisation can already be seen in the water sector. In many countries steps are being taken to privatise water sources and there are serious issues involved here. The fierce struggle in Bolivia over privatisation and the wholesale selling of water rights in Chile are only the start. In India efforts at privatisation have been limited to bottled drinking water. But formal and informal water markets are already in operation in various parts of the country.

The main thrust of the World Bank and other lending agency prescriptions for reforming the water sector is to take water out of the common property domain and privatise it in the interests of sustainability, efficiency, participatory management, etc.[48] Here we need to make a distinction between water rights and management being transferred from the state to collective entities of the users and that of being transferred to profit seeking enterprises. The World Bank and most international players conflate both these processes under the rubric of privatisation. However, we would say that we need to distinguish between the two; only the latter should properly be called privatisation. In our opinion, while we need to move towards user control, nothing can be as harmful as direct privatisation. The conflation of the two terms at best sows confusion, and at worst is but a cunning device to cloak the advocacy of the latter in the advocacy of the former.

Privatisation of water is likely to hit women and the resource-poor sections the most. Women have much more space for control over and access to water if there is greater user control. Women therefore need to identify themselves as users and ask for a greater role for themselves within the framework of water as a common property resource. It is only in such a framework that expanded and assured access to water needed for ensuring adequate livelihood needs of women and other resource poor sections would become possible.

Most critical thinking today lays the blame for the water crisis in the emphasis on large systems and argues for local sources under local control as the way out of the crisis. However, it is essential to realise that this is a half-truth. While there is no doubt that local resources are the base of sustainable development, it has to be understood that local water resources in most parts of the country need to be supplemented by water from large systems if they are to be dependable, and capable of providing livelihood assurance for the rural poor. What this means is that apart from asking for greater control over and access to local resources, there is also the need to ask for an equitable share of water from the large systems to supplement local resources and enhance dependability.[49] This is as important for women as it is for men. If, on this count, it is treated not as a gender issue, what results is the ghettoisation of women's issues that we have pointed out earlier.

Separation of water and user rights from land and ownership rights

A related concept to the above is to see women's access to water as part of a wider agenda for equitable water distribution. The core idea behind the concept of equitable water distribution is the separation of water right from landholding. In the conventional irrigation approach the right to water is related to land. This automatically results in a pattern of distribution that is weighted heavily in favour of large holders and the landless are completely out of the purview of the irrigation service. It is only recently that the importance of dissociating water and land rights has begun to be viewed as a serious possibility, with substantial potential for creating equitable access. This is especially important for women in India, as they do not enjoy effective land rights except perhaps in women-headed households.

There are two sources one can draw upon in this respect. On the one hand, we have traditional systems like the *phad* system in Maharashtra, and on the other, we have the pioneering efforts of Pani Panchayat, further continued and expanded by Mukti Sangharsh Movement. In the traditional *phad* system, the irrigated area in the village was divided into *phads*, which were organised contiguous commands with a common crop pattern (thus there would be a rabi wheat *phad*, and/or a sugarcane *phad*, etc.). Every household (at least the *savarna* or caste households) in the village had a piece of land allotted to it in each *phad*. Though holdings within the *phad* were not necessarily equal and holdings outside it were highly unequal, so far as access to water was concerned, a minimum access to water was created for every household in the *phad* irrespective of the total land held by the household. There was thus a certain degree of dissociation of water rights from land rights.

The pioneering work of the Pani Panchayat (PP) made this explicit. Every household had access to water in proportion to the number of members it had (half an acre of irrigated land equivalent per capita being the most common norm). In effect, this recognised access to water as an instrument of assuring livelihoods for persons. This right was vested in the persons themselves and not in the land they held. Though some of the Pani Panchayat schemes did discuss water rights for the landless, it was the Mukti Sangharsh Movement that made it their organising principle. It allowed individuals (including the landless) to sell and/or transfer their annual allocation without affecting or alienating their recurring right.

However, in the case of both *phad* and Pani Panchayat women did not have much access to or control over water for several reasons. Under the *phad* system water rights were restricted only to the *savarnas* or upper castes in the villages and women were totally out of their worldview. In the case of Pani Panchayat women were included in the water requirement and per capita allocation norm, but the household is the unit. Women certainly have benefited from the PP experiment, but they have not acquired water rights. Women appear mainly as 'family members' of the households of the male PP members. The PP also has not gone beyond many of the traditional beliefs and practices which exclude women. Traditionally only men can own land; under the PP scheme too it is the men who hold water rights. In fact, this applies to the landless 'households' too, it is the landless men who have access to water rights, and the women who are traditionally 'landless', cannot.[50]

Nevertheless, the PP principle marks a departure from the conventional thinking of water as an input into agriculture, and treating it instead as a 'means of production' on par with land, to which one has a right irrespective of whether one legally owns land. Accepting this principle has important implications so far as access to livelihood resources is concerned. First, though not the most favoured option, the landless and women who acquire such a right have the option of selling their annual allocation, thereby generating supplementary income. Second, and more importantly, they could use their share to lease land on which they could use their share of water. Water allocation based on these principles creates a situation where there are large holders who hold suitable irrigable land but are unable to irrigate it, and would therefore be interested in such an arrangement. Thirdly, and most importantly, with a water share allotted to them, access to smaller pieces of land and intensive cultivation could become much more meaningful to them. Without such a water share, small pieces of land and intensive cultivation would hardly be attractive.

There are further variations on this theme as indicated by the experience of Khudawadi, where a WUA situated at the tail end of the project went so far as to resolve that up to 15% of the water they received would be available for the landless and women's groups. One such group that was formed also successfully negotiated a medium-term produce sharing arrangement with owners of a wasteland tract and has since been able to develop the land and plant trees on it and extract fodder from it. That the landless and women's groups could not fully utilise the share offered to them by the WUA points more to the shortcomings of the organisers than to anything else. In fact, there are many such arrangements that have emerged, and in the absence of a comprehensive strategy and continuity, have also lapsed. In Tandulwadi (Baliraja Dam), for example, for a couple of years water was provided to women's groups for raising nurseries and selling saplings, as well as for small scale vegetable cultivation. There have been other such schemes too – for example, a scheme for dairy activity for the poor and landless groups with water allocations based on a radically different technology and marketing mix (i.e. dispersed autoclaves that can increase the shelf life of milk for up to six months, in preference to the large scale centralised chilling plants, combined with forward linkages to small town markets rather than the urban/metropolitan milk market). Such schemes allow women or the landless to lease in land for fodder production to cover their fodder shortfall.

Water: The looming conflicts

The depth of the crisis in the water sector is expressed in the dwindling water availability and the increasing conflict around it. India's utilisable fresh water resource is estimated at about 110–112 million ha-m. Of this, a little less than half (53 million ha-m) is currently utilised. Our renewable water resource in terms of annual rainfall, estimated on the basis of average precipitation, is 400 million ha-m. Of this, 185 million ha-m is available as surface storage, 50 million ha-m is stored underground (groundwater) and 165 million ha-m is stored in the soil as root-zone soil moisture.[51]

Massive investments have been made, especially after 1947, to tap water resources. Between 1951 and 1997, public sector plan outlays on all forms of irrigation and flood control, at current prices, totalled Rs. 860 billion. By the end of the 7th Plan (1990) we could create a total irrigation potential of about 79.5 million ha.[52] However, even with such massive investments and potential created, all is not well with our water sector. The system has not been able to deliver what it promised. Increasing drinking water shortage and dependence on water tankers even in high rainfall areas like the Konkan in Maharashtra and Kerala have become very common. Recurring drought – its intensification and spread – is another indicator of the crisis. Studies have shown that productivity of irrigated agriculture, in the long run, has been much less than the potential projected. Along with this, we have been losing prime quality agricultural tracts due to salinisation and waterlogging. Though it was expected that irrigation would help in creating more livelihood opportunities to the rural people, it was not so. This, along with uneven development, has forced large sections of rural people, especially from the drought prone areas and underdeveloped regions to migrate to cities and to irrigated belts in search of livelihoods. Increasing gaps in cost recovery, poor quality of service and lack of control by and participation of users are some of the other problems associated with the water sector.

MUCH OF INDIA FACES "ABSOLUTE WATER SCARCITY"

A recently conducted study by the International Water Management Institute has tried to project the scenario of water availability in the year 2025 and has divided the countries into the following four categories as per the relative availability of water.

Category 1: These countries face "absolute water scarcity". They will not be able to meet water needs in the year 2025.

Category 2: These countries face "economic water scarcity." They must more than double their efforts to extract water to meet 2025 water needs, but they will not have the financial resources available to develop these water supplies.

Category 3: These countries have to increase water development between 25 and 100 percent to meet 2025 needs, but have more financial resources to do so.

Category 4: These countries will have to increase water development modestly overall – on average, by only five per cent – to keep up with 2025 demands.

The first category includes those countries that are most water scarce and in 2025 will not have enough water to maintain 1990 levels of per capita food production from irrigated agriculture and meet industry, household, and environmental needs. The countries, defined as facing "absolute water scarcity," include 17 countries in the Middle East, South Africa, and the dryer regions of western and southern India and northern China, which account for more than 1 billion people today and are projected to account for as many as 1.8 billion in 2025.

The study notes that while India will not have major water problems on average, there will be massive regional variations in water availability. Though India is placed in Category 4 (the countries in this category will have to increase water development modestly overall - on average, by only five percent - to keep up with 2025 demands), a sizable portion of its population (280 million people in India in 1990) are placed in Category 1 of absolute water scarcity.

(Source: *International Water Management Institute – Report appeared in the March Issue of the International Journal of Water Resources Development*)

Water has become an issue of contention and conflict between competing uses and different interest groups. The conflict takes the form of 'inter' and 'intra' (within and between) villages, regions, states and nations. It is predicted that this conflict would get accentuated in the future as different uses, users and interest groups are vying for this scarce resource. 'Water scarcity is now the single greatest threat to human health, the environment, and the global food supply..... It also threatens global peace as countries in Asia and the Middle East seek to cope with shortages'.[53] In India we all know about the simmering conflict between competing states around our major river systems: Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala over the Cauvery waters; Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh over the Krishna waters; and Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Rajasthan and Maharashtra over the Narmada waters. In the recent past the Narmada valley became the battle ground between the pro-dam and the anti-dam groups; between the project affected who are mostly *adivasis*, and the 'beneficiaries' of Gujarat. The conflict does not stop at the level of different states or on the question of sharing waters from the interstate rivers. The conflict has percolated to different levels and layers of society and between contending uses and needs. To quote from the recently published WCD Report, "The unfolding scenario for water use in many parts of the world is one of increasing concern about access, equity and the response to growing needs. This affects relations between: rural and urban populations; upstream and downstream interests; agricultural, industrial and domestic sectors; and human needs and the requirements of a healthy environment".[54]

WOMEN'S RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE SECOND MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON WATER

> The Conference [at the World Water Forum at the Hague in March 2000] came up with a 21 point agenda 'based on a comprehensive vision of how sustainable, efficient water management and conservation systems can be achieved' and the first 12 items and also the 19th one in the agenda directly relate to women's access to water and participation in decision making processes and institutions, as given below:
>
> 1. New water management policies should be designed in such a way as to safeguard and promote the livelihoods of women, especially those in vulnerable social sectors of the globe.
> 2. Women should be drawn into the process of consultation at all levels when policy is created, systems developed and mechanisms designed.
> 3. Women's capacities to engage in public consultation processes should be enhanced so they can contribute to this global endeavour. The constraints on their participation should be addressed: time and costs of participation, time and location of meetings, etc.
> 4. Women's rights to water should be ensured, as well as women's rights to participate in water-related organisations and institutions. Creative legal mechanisms should be devised and enforced to prevent the restriction of water access and control only to those with land rights, and to prevent the

restriction of participation in decision-making processes and institutions to those with land-rights or to heads of 'households'.

5. Women's knowledge and experience of water management should be acknowledged as a global resource to be developed, encouraged and used.
6. Gender analysis should be integrated into all water research, problem diagnosis and formulation of solutions and actions.
7. Strict systems of public control must be designed and put into place to ensure that private companies do not exploit the basic need for water for the sake of profit. Stepped tariffs are essential to ensure that households, small family business and large enterprises can be charged for water on a differential basis.
8. Pricing of water must take into account the fact that water is a human need as well as an input into economic activity. Stringent legal mechanisms at an international level should ensure that water is not simply sold to the highest bidder but is first made available on the basis of basic need. Careful studies must be undertaken to discover what women are able to pay for sufficient supplies to maintain adherence to health and nutrition targets, and home production of food. Pricing policies must take into account women's unpaid or underpaid contributions to the economy and avoid adding further burdens on the shoulders of women.
9. Women should be encouraged to enter the water management industry at all levels, so they can contribute to and benefit from any additional resources going into this sector. Training programmes should be launched to ensure that women and girls are equipped with the relevant technical, managerial, organisational and social skills needed.
10. Gender training must be launched for water management personnel at all levels, so that the design and execution of projects ensure equitable access to all regardless of gender and class.
11. Water conservation projects and programmes should be directed towards involving women – who often have a wealth of knowledge regarding local water circumstances compared with men and outside experts. Women's skills in water conservation strategies should be upgraded.
12. Women's experience in setting up low-cost water delivery systems on a co-operative basis should be built on. Credit facilities should be made available and technical support offered to these initiatives.

(*Source:* Gender 21: Women's Recommendations to the 2nd Ministerial Conference on Water – An International Networking Project, carried out by the International Information Centre and Archives for the Women's Movement (IIAV); March 2000)

Mainstreaming gender also means contextualising women–water relationship in this crisis

Women cannot keep away from this impending multi-faceted water crisis and the discourse about women and water has to also contextualise itself within this crisis. While initiating programmes and projects built around women, care needs to be taken to see that these do not get 'ghetto-ised'; instead these initiatives need to be woven into a wider movement for protecting and developing India's water sources as a true common property/common pool resource. In other words women's initiatives become part of a wider agenda for restructuring the water sector along more sustainable, equitable, participatory and decentralised lines. Women's world views, aspirations, needs, qualities, skills and the 'intrinsic' relationship with water (and other natural resources) have to be taken into account. This would encompass all aspects of water, namely, source creation, prioritisation of different water uses, access and distribution, the production system (crops, other forms of biomass, animal husbandry, fishery, etc.), crop technology, water tariff system and cost recovery, operation and maintenance, institutional forms and structure for water allocation and management and the type of technology used. But in order to make this possible, women themselves would have to spearhead the agenda for a sustainable and equitable restructuring of the water sector as a whole, and ensure that the agenda integrates women's rights and aspirations.

NOTES

(The ideas underlying this essay owe a lot to feminist writings on the subject, our discussions with women from the women's movements and our association with different grassroots groups, research organisations and mass movements working towards sustainable and equitable development. In particular, for this essay, we would like to acknowledge the help we have received from Sara Ahmed, Seema Kulkarni, Swatija Manorama and Nagmani Rao. Needless to say, they are not responsible for any of the inadequacies of the essay.)

1. Daya Pawar, in *Shramikanchi Gani,* Mumbai: Krantiba Phule Sanskritic Manch, 1991. This is a translated version (by Suhas Paranjape) of the original Marathi poem by the late Dalit poet Daya Pawar.
2. Comet Group, *Bharat ki Chhap*, 13-part film serial supported by the NCSTC, DST, Mumbai: Comet Media Foundation 1995. The oldest evidence of the neolithic and of agriculture in the subcontinent comes from the excavations at Mehergarh in Pakistan on the Afghan-Pakistan border. Much of the account of the ancient period given here relies on the 13-part film serial Bharat ki Chhap that was prepared by the Comet Group for the NCSTC, DST.
3. Ibid.
4. David Ludden, 'Archaic Formations of Agricultural Knowledge in South India' in Robb, Peter (ed.), *Meanings of Agriculture: Essays in South Asian History and Ideas*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996. This is an ancient Tamil poem on "harnessing water"; from Parananannuru, No. 18, poem of Sangam period literature.
5. Comet Group, *Bharat ki Chhap*, 13-part film serial supported by the NCSTC, DST, Mumbai: Comet Media Foundation 1995.
6. A.Vaidyanathan (ed.), *Tanks of South India*, New Delhi: Centre for Science and Environment, 2001.
7. Comet Group, *Bharat ki Chhap*.
8. S. Salmon, 'Legal and Symbolic Significance of the 'Menstrual Pollution' of Rivers', *Lariviere*, 1984, pp. 153–178, as cited by Feldhaus in Feldhaus, Anne, *Water and*

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12. W. Seaforth, 'Why Water is a Women's Issue', *Habitat Debate*, UNCHS Habitat, Vol. 7 No. 1, 2001.
13. C.Van Wijk-Sijbesma, 1998, *Gender in Water Resources Management, Water Supply and Sanitation: Roles and Realities Revisited*, Technical Paper Series 33-E, The Hague: International Reference Centre on Water, as cited by Sara Ahmed, 'In Search of a Drop: Women and Drinking Water Management in Rural Gujarat (India) – The Case of SEWA', Working Paper 137, Anand: Institute of Rural Management, 2000.
14. NEDA, *Rights of Women to the Natural Resources: Land and Water*, The Hague: Netherlands Development Assistance, 1997 and Vandana Shiva, 'Women's Water Rights', *Waterlines*, Vol. 17, No. 1, 1998 as cited by Sara Ahmed, 'In Search of a Drop'.
15. C. Green, S. Joekes, and M. Leach, 'Questionable Links: Approaches to Gender in Environment Research and Policy', in C. Jackson and R. Pearson (Eds.), *Feminist Visions of Development: Gender Analysis and Policy*, London: Routledge, 1998 as cited by Sara Ahmed, 'In Search of a Drop'.
16. Sara Ahmed, 'In Search of a Drop'.
17. Brinda Rao, *Dominant Constructions of Women and Nature in Social Science Literature*, Santa Cruz: CES/CNS Pamphlet 2, 1991.
18. There is quite a lot of literature available on these issues under the broad theme of 'Women in Development'. E. Boserup, *Women's Role in Economic Development*, London: George, Allen and Unwin, 1970; Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour*, London: Zed Books, 1985; E. Leacock, 'Women, Power and Authority', in L. Dube, E. Leacock and E. Ardner (eds.), *Visibility and Power: Essays on Women in Society and Development*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1986; G. Dietrich, 'Development, Ecology and Women's Struggles', *Social Action*, vol. 38, 1988, etc., have extensively dealt with these issues.
19. Brinda Rao, 'Struggling for Production Conditions and Producing Conditions for Emancipation: Women and Water in Rural Maharashtra', *Capitalism Nature and Socialism*, No. 2, 1989.
20. K.R. Datye, and R.K. Patil, *Farmer Managed Irrigation Systems: Indian Experiences*, Mumbai: Centre for Applied Systems Analysis in Development, 1987 documents different experiences of people managed irrigation systems and Chapter IV deals with the Phad system.
21. A. Vaidyanathan (ed.), *Tanks of South India.*

22. Based on personal communication with Dr. A. Vaidyanathan. To quote, "The explanation for women not figuring in the context of irrigation is simply that they are not involved in irrigation activities. The function of securing, applying and managing water is in most places taken care of by the males. There may be exceptions e.g., North Eastern states, Himachal Pradesh and Uttaranchal where for a variety of reasons women seen to have been more active in agriculture. Where women do have a direct interest and role is in relation to water for domestic use."
23. Sara Ahmed, 'Changing Gender Roles in Irrigation Management: Sadguru's Lift Irrigation Co-operatives', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXXIV, No. 51, 1999.
24. E. Boserup, *Women's Role in Economic Development*, as cited by Brinda Rao, *Dominant Constructions of Women and Nature.*
25. The term 'reproductive' is used here more in the sense of social rather than biological reproduction. It refers to all of the services provided by women to ensure the healthy maintenance of their families, including cooking, cleaning, and child care. (See E. Rathgeber, 'Women, Men and Water Resource Management in Africa', in Rached, Eglal, Rathgeber, Eva, and Brooks David B. (eds.), *Water Management in Africa and the Middle East: Challenges and Opportunities* available at http://gstgateway.wigsat.org/ta/NOS/envt/cases.html.
26. Brinda Rao, *Dominant Constructions of Women and Nature.*
27. W. Seaforth, 'Why Water is a Women's Issue'.
28. Brinda Rao, *Dominant Constructions of Women and* Nature.
29. Bina Agarwal, 'Women, Poverty and Agricultural Growth in India', *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 4, 1986, deal with some of the issues arising from drought and famines (in more general terms of degeneration of environment and resource base) on the lives of women both at a conceptual and empirical level; Anil Agarwal, *Why Girls of Syuta Drop out of School*, available at www.peopleandplanet.net/bissues/pap_7_3/agarwal.htm discusses the relationship between female literacy and time spent on procuring the basic needs like water, fodder, fuel, etc.; K.J. Joy and Nagmani Rao, "Degenerated Agriculture and its Effects: A Study of Socio-Economic Transformation in Khanapur Taluka of Southern Maharashtra", Pune: Samaj Vigyan Granthalaya, 1993, looks at the effects of degenerated agriculture and drought from a class, caste and gender point of view at a taluk level. Apart from the other impacts like shortage of fodder, fuel and water and its impact on women's labour and health, more and more women are forced to become wage earners. Often women outnumber men at the Employment Guarantee Scheme sites in Maharashtra and this is also true in the case of Rajasthan during the recent drought as revealed in the personal communication with Ajaybhan Singh who works with Society for Promoting Wasteland Development in Udaipur region. To quote him, "We observed some trends in the performance of wage labour in South Rajasthan region (in the tribal villages). During the last drought the relief work (whether NGO or GO supported) was mostly undertaken by women. The menfolk were usually trying to get wage labour in the nearby town travelling up and down during the day and night. In some villages it has been observed that as much as 75% of the entire work was completed by women... But this is overloading the women

drastically and has a bad impact on their health as (a) they have to wake up early to prepare food; (b) they have to arrange for water for drinking and household purposes, which is usually available at a more distant place than the normal; (c) they have to go for wage labour as in the normal course their men used to go for work; and (d) they have to take entire care of their cattle as the men were out. The arrangements for fodder need an extra effort, because it is in short supply. The situation is the worst if the women have young babies or are pregnant. In these conditions they generally lose their capacity for hard work. On the other hand they need increased nutrition. This requirement is seldom met even at normal times, then how can it be expected in a distress period? In a way it can be said that the women are the worst sufferers of all these calamities. All the additional costs have to be borne by them". Also see the initiative of Mukti Sangharsh Movement and Stri Mukti Sangharsh in Southern Maharashtra (given in the text) how an adversity like drought could pave the way for women getting organised and be in the forefront of the anti-drought and equitable water distribution movement.

30. R. Mahapatra, 'Drought of Relief', *Down to Earth*, Vol. 10, No.2, 2001.
31. K.R. Datye, Suhas Paranjape, and R.K. Patil, 'Role of Non Agricultural Incomes and Socio-economic Aspects of Management of Drought', *Proceedings of the All India Seminar on Strategies for Drought Proofing and Management*, Ahmedabad, 1987. They see drought in more systemic terms as an interaction between the ecological sub-system and the socio-economic sub-system and brings out the importance of non-farm incomes in the strategy for drought proofing.
32. Arundhati Roy, 'The Greater Common Good', *Outlook*, May 24, 1999 very forcefully brings out the issues related to the oustees of Sardar Sarovar Project and the award winning Marathi novel by V. Patil, *Zada Zadti* (Marathi), Pune: Rajhans Prakashan, 1991, is based on the lives of the dam affected people in Maharashtra.
33. Anant Phadke, 'Dam Oustees' Movement in South Maharashtra', *Economic and Political Weekly*, November 18, 2000 analyses the experience of a combined struggle of the drought affected and dam affected people in Southern Maharashtra. Suhas Paranjape, and K.J. Joy, *Sustainable Technology: Making Sardar Sarovar Viable*, Ahmedabad: Centre for Environment Education, 1995 discusses an alternative to the present Sardar Sarovar Project and details an innovative approach to harvesting and managing large water sources at the same time bringing down the extent of submergence and displacement and sees the issue of rehabilitation as part of a comprehensive upstream area development programme.
34. Bina Agarwal, 'Women, Poverty and Agricultural Growth in India'. Gail Omvedt, *Effects of Agricultural Development on the Status of Women*, unpublished, ILO Study Report, mimeo, 1980. In fact there are many more researchers, particularly women, who have looked critically at irrigated high input agriculture and their impact on women, though from different stand points. Vandana Shiva, *The Violence of Green Revolution*, Penang, Malaysia: Third World Network, 1991 looks at the relationship between violence and green revolution agriculture. Brinda Rao, 'Struggling for Production Conditions and Producing Conditions for Emancipation, looks at the dominant constructions of women

and nature in social science literature and also summarises the major arguments in the women-ecology-development debate. Meena Seshu, and Vasant Bhosale, *Imprisoning Womanhood – A Report on Death and Desertions of Women in Sangli District*, Sangli: V.I.D.P., 1990, traces the increase in the violence on women (including desertion), especially dowry related, in Sangli district, Maharashtra, to the increase and growth of sugarcane cultivation and sugar factories.

35. Experiences of Sadguru in Gujarat and Pani Panchayat in Maharashtra (there are many more such cases) show that with conscious efforts irrigation and irrigated agriculture can make a positive difference to the lives of the people including women.
36. FAO Focus, *Women and the Green Revolution*, FAO Focus on Women and Food Security available at http://www.fao.org/FOCUS/E/Women/green-e.htm.
37. For a detailed discussion see Gail Omvedt, *Reinventing Revolution: New Social Movements and the Socialist Tradition in India*, New York: M. E. Sharpe, Inc. 1993; Chandi Prasad Bhatt, 'Women Determine a People's Programme: Lessons from the Chipko Movement', in Rao and Rurup (Ed.), *A Just Right: Women's Ownership of Natural Resources and Livelihood Security*, New Delhi: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (India Office), 1997.
38. Nandita Gandhi and Nandita Shah, *The Issues at Stake: Theory and Practice in the Contemporary Women's Movement in India*, Bombay: South Asia Books, 1992.
39. Nagmani Rao, *Rural Women in Non-Party Struggles: Experiences from a Grassroots Organisation in Sangli District, Maharashtra*, Mumbai: Women's Studies Unit, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, 1995.
40. The write up is based on Dalwai, Ashok, undated, *Can Women Do PIM?*, available at www.inpim.org/Library/Newsletters/N5a1/n5a5.html. It describes the story of a Water Users' Association (WUA) in Orissa managed primarily by women. Though this is an exception rather than the general case so far as on Participatory Irrigation Management (PIM) in India is concerned, it does indicate what is possible.
41. Vincent Subramaniam, 'Utthan Development Action Planning Team', *India Together*, January 2001 available at www.indiatogether.org/stories/utthan.htm; Barot, Nafisa and Mehta, Salil, 'Women and Water Harvesting', in Agarwal, Anil; Narain, Sunita and Khurana, Indira (eds.), *Making Water Everybody's Business: Practice and Policy of Water Harvesting*, New Delhi: Centre for Science and Environment, 2001.
42. Ranjit Dev Raj, 'Development-India: Women Take Over Water and Sanitation', *Financial Express*, April 11, 1999 and Acharya, Keya, *Once Organised, Rural Women Realise Their Power*, available at www.tips.org/IPS/human.NSF/86afef403a5ab0ca802565b0004cc6df/7320073300ce65328025683c004ea79d? OpenDocument
43. Nagmani Rao, *Rural Women in Non-Party Struggles*; Gail Omvedt, *Reinventing Revolution: New Social Movements and the Socialist Tradition in India*, New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc. 1993; Gail Omvedt, and Bharat Patankar, 'Movement for Water: Takari Peasants' Struggle in Maharashtra', *Economic and Political Weekly*, April 13, 1991; Anant R.S. Phadke, 'A People's Dam', *Economic and Political Weekly*, April 22, 1989; Anant R.S. Phadke, 'Left Response to Drought in Maharashtra', *Economic and Political Weekly*, February 8, 1992; Anant R.S. Phadke, 'Science and Sustainable Development', *Economic and Political Weekly*, November 7, 1992; Anant Phadke, 'Anti-Drought Movement in Sangli District',

Economic and Political Weekly, November 26, 1994; Anant Phadke, 'Dam Oustees' Movement in South Maharashtra', *Economic and Political Weekly*, November 18, 2000; K.J. Joy, and Nagmani Rao, 'The Great Sand Robbery and Impending Ecological Disaster', *Economic and Political Weekly*, August 13, 1988; K.J. Joy, and Nagmani Rao, "Degenerated Agriculture and its Effects: A Study of Socio-Economic Transformation in Khanapur Taluka of Southern Maharashtra", carried out by Shankar Brahme Samajvignyan Granthalaya, Pune and sponsored by Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi, 1993.

44. Sara Ahmed, 'In Search of a Drop' 2000; Ranjit Dev Raj, 'Development-India: Women Take Over Water and Sanitation'; and Sudarshan Iyengar, *Women's Initiatives in Development and Management of Sustainable Drinking Water Sources in Gujarat Villages: Issues and Case Studies*, unpublished, mimeo, Ahmedabad: Gujarat Institute of Development Research, 2000.
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46. Shilpa Vasavada, *Women Irrigators And Participatory Irrigation Management: Policy And Approaches To Mainstream Gender Concerns, Lessons From Aga Khan Rural Support Programme*, Ahmedabad, The Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP) (undated - mimeo). The narration of the experience of AKRSP's work related to women's participation in participatory irrigation management is based on this.
47. The write up on the experience of Sadguru's Lift Irrigation Co-operatives is based on Sara Ahmed, 'Changing Gender Roles in Irrigation Management: Sadguru's Lift Irrigation Co-operatives', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXXIV, No. 51, 1999.
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49. Suhas Paranjape and K.J. Joy, *Sustainable Technology: Making Sardar Sarovar Viable*, Ahmedabad: Centre for Environment Education, 1995.
50. Brinda Rao, 'Struggling for Production Conditions and Producing Conditions for Emancipation'.
51. Gian N. Kathpalia, "Policy and strategy for Participatory Water Resources and Irrigation Management", Paper presented at the Seminar on Water Policy: Agricultural Scientists' Perception, Indian Agricultural Research Institute, New Delhi 1996, as cited in Anil Agarwal, Sunita Narain, and Srabani Sen (eds.), *The Citizens' Fifth Report*, Part I & II, New Delhi: Centre for Science and Environment, 1999.
52. Government of India, 1992, *Report of the Committee on Pricing of Irrigation Water under*

the Chairmanship of Dr. A. Vaidyanathan. Unpublished, mimeo, 1992. A. Vaidyanathan (ed.), 2001, *Tanks of South India*.

53. D. Seckler, U. Amarasinghe, D. Molden, R. de Silva and R. Barker, *World Water Demand and Supply, 1990 to 2025: Scenarios and Issues* Research Report No 19, International Water Management Institute, Colombo, 1998.
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CHAPTER 16

Women, Hunger, and Famine: Bengal, 1350/1943

Parama Roy

> When he emerged from the meditation, he told them that the deity had granted him a vision in the form of a terrible figure. It was the figure of a dreadful female, dark and completely naked, flying atop a blood-red cloud and saying, 'I'm the famine'. From the almanac he had figured out that she was indeed the witch. They would have to find her and drive her away.[1]
>
> Two great hungers had struck the land of Bengal in the wake of war: the hunger of masses of people uprooted from their old earth and turned into beggars, and the hunger of the all-owning few for pleasure and more pleasure, a raging fever of the times. Uprooted women with their own kind of hunger had to soothe the other hunger, had to cool the raging pleasure-fever with their bodies.[2]

FIGURES OF FAMINE

I would like to commence my paper with a few rehearsals of the obvious. Not enough formal work has been done on women and hunger in South Asia, but there is evidence abounding on women's vexed relationship with food and to eating. We know, for instance, of caste Hindu women's function as symbolic and literal providers (*Annapurna, Lakshmi*) rather than consumers of food. This association with cooking and serving, rather than with eating, is literalized in the structure of meals in orthodox (and even not-so-orthodox) caste Hindu households; men and children are served first and men receive the choicest portions, while the women who cook and serve the meals make do with whatever is left over. There are hierarchies among the women as well, with the youngest daughter-in-law, widows, and poor female relatives occupying the lowest rungs of this gastropolitical order.[3] This secondariness at mealtimes and a diet of less desirable and leftover foods, combined with women's observance of fasts and other forms of alimentary asceticism and the severe dietary privations of caste Hindu widows, has ensured a manifest if usually unremarked place for hunger in their quotidian experience.[4] Moreover, as Tanika Sarkar notes in her reading of Rasasundari Devi's *Amar Jiban*, these prescriptions often come to be internalized by the very women in charge of the apportionment of food. Thus Rasasundari Devi, who was unconstrained by the presence of elder female in-laws or by gastronomic dearth, nonetheless chose to feed upon plain rice alone, even when no one was present to watch her eating.[5] Indeed, Amartya Sen suggests that female malnutrition in Bengal is not entirely reducible to external constraint or to poverty. In a study of rural poverty, nutrition, and the bias against female children, he has suggested that increasing rural family income may not suffice to remedy the deprivations of the female child; 'direct nutritional intervention through supplementary feeding' is necessary to compensate for familial (including maternal) biases in favour of male members.[6] While young children are, in many instances, not strictly bound by rules of caste and gender, Sen's example demonstrates that female children are not exempt from various forms of alimentary subordination; as infants they are breast-fed for a shorter duration than are boys, their *annaprashan* ceremonies (a ceremony in which the infant is first fed rice) are usually far less elaborate than those for their brothers, and they are routinely fed less well than male children. Little heed is taken moreover of lactating mothers' increased dietary needs, breast-feeding being thought of as 'natural' and 'costless'; when malnourished women breast-feed their infants, it is therefore at the expense of their own health, time, and energy.[7] While calculated abortions of female foetuses and female infanticide account in part for the striking and anomalous ratios of females to males in the Indian population, there is little doubt that these forms of nutritional (and medical) denial also contribute markedly to high rates of female mortality. Sen has highlighted the violence that produces this shortfall of women in the total population by using the term 'missing women' to describe the large numbers of women who do not exist as a result of outright violence, familial neglect, and unequal access to nutrition and medical care. Using female–male ratios that are representative of sub-Saharan Africa as a norm for nation-states in the South, he has calculated that there are as many as 37 million missing women in India alone and 100 million worldwide.[8] While some demographers have disputed these numbers (one has suggested a worldwide toll of 60 million, while another has suggested 90 million), none can gainsay the fact of staggering disparities.

All this is so well known that it usually passes unremarked except by the occasional scholar. In such a landscape of unremarkable female hunger and deprivation, it is notable, therefore, that the Bengal famine of 1350/1943 was characterized as prominently as it was by an iconography of *female* suffering. Margaret Kelleher has noted such a gendering of famine in the instances of both the Irish famine of the 1840s and the Bengal famine of 1943.[9] What are we to make of such a phenomenon? Despite the fact that males (both adult and juvenile) died in slightly higher numbers than did women in this holocaust, literary depictions, journalistic accounts, and newspaper photographs in the Calcutta *Statesman*, the *Hindusthan Standard*, and the *Ananda Bazar Patrika* return repeatedly to certain stock images: the mother unable to breast-feed her child, the infant suckling at the breast of its dead mother, a woman selling, abandoning, or destroying her child, the young rural woman enticed into prostitution in order to stave off the pangs of famine. Even works as recent as Satyajit Ray's *Asani Sanket* [Distant Thunder, 1973] and Mrinal Sen's *Akaler Sandhaney* [In Search of Famine, 1980] stage their crises around female chastity in conditions of dearth and social collapse (though in ways that are very distinct from each other). These images are, however, often shot through with a certain equivocality despite or perhaps *because* of their frequently fulsome quality. It is precisely this apposition of sentimental female iconicity with certain forms of equivocation that is of interest here, and to which I address myself. The iconic device of the female sufferer (and its double, the 'unnatural' woman who renounces her obligations to her progeny and, secondarily, to her male protectors) is seen as the figure that is the most commensurable with the threat to social harmony and hierarchy that famine represents. This essay scrutinizes the significance of this figuration of famine as female in a number of texts, journalistic, anthropological, literary, economic, historical, and cinematic; it does so in order to read the famine representations of 1350/1943 as profoundly important documents of social crisis and transformation, documents that illuminate questions of female iconicity and gendered responsibility.

A word about famine first. We know of course that scarcity, hunger, and famine are metonymically chained to popular conceptions of South Asia; the Indian subcontinent has long been, along with China, Russia, and twentieth-century Ethiopia and the Sahel, one of the proverbial 'lands of famine'.[10] Such a reputation has become if anything more emphatic in the modern period. While the death tolls from particular famines in the last quarter of the nineteenth century did not approach the apocalyptic mortality figures (ten million, about a third of the inhabitants of a densely populated province) of the Bengal famine of 1770, their cumulative toll was twice that of 1770.[11] Historians, economists, and Indian nationalists have long noted not only the profound failures of the colonial state in providing famine relief but also in begetting the conditions (rigid taxation, neglect of irrigation, prevention of industrialization, and the privileging of landlord and moneylender interests over those of peasants) that produced famine conditions in the first place.[12] As in the case of Ireland in the 1840s, faith in the principles of political economy and Malthusian theories of population made for a reluctance to interfere with markets or what were believed to be incontrovertible natural laws of population growth. The slow and grudging emergence of a famine code (and a corresponding famine insurance fund) in the 1870s and 1880s did not necessarily mark a new conception of state responsibility for famine relief, functioning instead in its early years as an occasion for raising taxes to finance military ventures in Afghanistan.[13] And while India remained free of major famines (though it suffered eighteen 'scarcities') between 1908 and 1942, as many as three million people are estimated to have perished in the Bengal famine of 1943–44. Indeed, it is possible to argue that of the two watershed events of the subcontinent's difficult passage into modernity – the 1943 Bengal famine and the bloodbath associated with the 1947 partition of India – the former was, for Bengalis, perhaps the more traumatic one. This famine was marked by a strenuous reluctance on the part of the state (both at the provincial and the federal levels) to concede that there was a subsistence crisis, and in fact the event was never officially designated as a famine. The *Statesman* was to write scathingly about state-invented euphemisms for starvation and famine in 1943: 'The grim word starvation disappeared from the text [of government statistics], remaining only in our own headings; instead, sufferers admitted to hospitals were dubbed 'sick destitutes', and a laboured appendix contended that most of the 37 deaths on Saturday were due to chronic ailments 'neglected in the past'.[14] Part of what the famine literature demonstrates – and it is a point that a chronicler of hunger such as Mahasweta Devi underscores with caustic clear-sightedness in her novella 'Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay, and Pirtha' – is that the language of state (whether colonial *or* postcolonial) has recourse to an increasingly baroque lexicon of scarcity and crisis; it is a lexicon replete with droughts and scarcities and relief measures but it scrupulously avoids the deployment of the damning term famine.[15]

Partially as a result of such official obfuscations, it has been difficult to determine in any precise manner the onset, duration, and costs of the famine. (It should be mentioned that mortality figures for famines are generally difficult to determine, since the usual modes of demographic accounting break down in situations of crises. Besides, diseases continue to claim lives even after famines are officially concluded. Amartya Sen has examined statistics from the 1943–46 period, rather than simply the 1943–44 span, in order to determine the excess mortality attributable to famine.) The Japanese conquest of Burma in 1942 cut off imports of coarse Burmese rice into Bengal and prompted terror in the colonial government. The 'boat denial' scheme, which was undertaken in response to fears of a Japanese invasion, removed or destroyed tens of thousands of boats in coastal areas, thus effectively eliminating the means of livelihood for large numbers of fishermen and the mode of transportation of people and goods in an area where rivers as much as roads were used for transportation. (Fishing communities were to constitute a large percentage of famine mortality figures in the ensuing years.) This was matched by a 'rice denial' scheme, through which cultivators were forced to sell tens of thousands of tons of grain to the government for the purpose of supplying the military and the industrial workers who were essential to the war effort. While these exercises directly affected only a small proportion of Bengal's population, they induced widespread panic and an epidemic of hoarding. Thus, though, the rice crop for 1942 was not substantially lower than the crop for the previous half decade and actually higher than that for 1941 (a non-famine year), and there were no natural disasters of unprecedented scope (notwithstanding the cyclone that hit Midnapore in October 1942), prices increased exponentially over the course of 1943; growers and traders withheld their stocks from the market, either out of fear of requisitioning or price controls, or in the hope of making large profits in the face of rapidly rising prices. Developments such as these led to the widespread sense that the famine of 1350/1943–44 was a 'man-made' event; it is an analysis that has been confirmed by the voluminous scholarship on the subject, which has described the events of these years as a 'boom famine'.[16]

As massive price increases put rice out of the reach of peasants, sharecroppers, fishermen, and others of the rural poor (poorly fed at the best of times), they turned to other kinds of food (and non-food) items: arum roots, wild greens, snails, and grass. Many sold what land they possessed in distress sales; it is estimated that the events of 1943–44 precipitated the largest transfer of land in Bengal since the Permanent Settlement of 1793. Household goods, cattle, tools, and women's jewellery were sold for food. Large numbers of men abandoned or turned out their female dependents (including wives, sisters, and widowed relatives) and children. Of the destitutes who took to – or were forced on to – the road to Calcutta, women and girls were at particular risk of sexual assault and exploitation. Vijaylakshmi Pandit was only one among many observers to note that 'Women destitutes are in a worse plight than the men. Cases have been brought to my knowledge of these poor creatures being raped at night while lying out on the roads. There also appear to be certain people at work who attempt to decoy women who are destitute and without protection'.[17] Large numbers of women and girls were also inducted into prostitution; some among these were kidnapped and some were sold, often by their own parents. In light of such evidence, it is difficult to concur with Appadurai's speculation that the abandonment of women and children by their male caretakers 'might … equally be regarded as part of an effort to maximize the life-chance of each and every member of the family in circumstances where co-residence was clearly not feasible. Thus the sale of children (however distasteful to a parent) might be seen (and has been seen in other times and places) as an effort to construct a better set of life-chances than those of the existing family structure'.[18] Women were not as free as were men to maximize their life-chances outside patriarchal familial structures; nor should it be forgotten that the overwhelming number of children who were sold were girls, and by parents who were not entirely innocent of the reasons that buyers favoured female children over male ones.

The city of Calcutta (whose workers were protected from the worst effects of famine through food subsidies and rationing) saw the influx of hundreds of thousands of starving people from the countryside. Almost all of them lived on the streets. Some of them were fed (through government-administered feeding centres and through private relief societies) at food distribution centres, though observers as well as famine sufferers often complained about the quality and purity of the food, alleging that it induced or exacerbated stomach problems. It appears that more women than men were likely to end up relying on such charity. For much of the duration of the famine, the government at Delhi remained impervious to the problems of Bengal, accusing Bengalis of 'over-dramatizing' the situation and refusing the permit, except briefly, the import of food from other provinces; the Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow (whose term ended in October 1944) never visited Bengal. Strict censorship of Indian papers also ensured that news of the famine did not come in the way of war efforts being conducted from Westminster and Whitehall. The British Parliament was in any event rendered hostile to Indian concerns by the militancy of Indian nationalism; meanwhile at Whitehall Winston Churchill claimed that the famine had been caused by the propensity of Indians to breed 'like rabbits'.[19] The provincial government in Calcutta also proved remarkably inept at dealing with the tragedy. Law and order, however, remained unthreatened through it all. People starved to death in front of food shops guarded by the police, and an efficient and far-flung railway system ensured, not the transportation of foodgrains into Bengal or the speedy migration of the famine-stricken to more prosperous areas, but the transportation of foodgrains out of famine-stricken areas by hoarders and profiteers. When the crisis was hastily declared to have ended in late 1943, most of the rural refugees were forcibly repatriated to their homes.

There are differing estimates of the mortality figures for the famine of 1943–44. The famine Enquiry Commission, which convened in 1944, arrived at a death toll of 1.5 million, after noting the inaccuracy of public health statistics in India.[20] It was a number that one of its members, W.R. Aykroyd, was to characterize, at a later date, as altogether too low.[21] Amartya Sen's estimate of three million, which takes into account the staggered mortality effect of famine as a consequence of malnutrition and lowered resistance to disease, is generally accepted by historians and economists.[22] Mrinal Sen's screenplay for *Akaler Sandhaney* puts the figure at five million. So does Satyajit Ray in *Asani Sanket.* All of them caution against a simple and unconsidered opposition between famine and a putative alimentary normalcy, noting that chronic malnutrition and dearth characterized the lives of peasants (the archetypal victims of famine) in non-famine contexts as well.

WOMEN AND FAMINE

While the famine of 1350/1943 showcased female figures to a notable degree, it was not, of course, the first among the subcontinent's numerous famines to feature an iconography of female centrality to conceptions of prosperity, fertility, and dearth. In his study of peasant responses to the great Madras famine of 1876-8, David Arnold notes the ritually significant role of women in the dispelling of famine and the reinstation of fertility, a role that involved extensive participation in village rain-making and propitiatory ceremonies. Such ceremonies and prayers did not simply involve female actors but also had a notably gendered *content*; a Bihari women's song went thus:

> A wonder has taken place, O Lord!
> The male is grinding millet and the female is ploughing fields.
> Is not your heart moved with pity, O God!
> The widow Brahmani is ploughing the field.[23]

Such a ritual intervention by female actors not only saw women as central to the maintenance of fertility and order; it also cast famine itself as a derangement of proper relations among genders (and castes), turning men into women, women into men, and married women into widows. The famine of 1350/1943 was thus not the first in characterizing famine as the unsettling of a normative gendered order.

On a more terrestrial plane too, women have remained central to any accounting of famine. As Arnold notes, 'the burden of famine fell, and in many Third world societies continues to fall, with exceptional severity upon women'.[24] Far from being a leveller, famine has generally tended to exacerbate extant forms of inequality and exploitation, including gendered ones. Famines have been characterized as 'highly divisive phenomena. … It is rare to find a famine that affected more than 5 or 10 per cent of the population. There are, to be sure, alleged accounts of famines in which nearly everyone in a country had to go hungry. But most of these anecdotes do not bear much scrutiny'.[25] Women, who have customarily had inferior access to the food and medical resources of the family in conditions of alimentary normalcy, experience a heightening of such disparities in the eventuality of famine. Sanjay Sharma cites a turn-of-the-century famine song from western Malwa that strikingly illustrates the grossly unequal effects of the famine upon women: 'Paraniyo chor gayo ghar ki nar/ Mamoji khaya gaya bhanji ne bech/ Sasu poche, susro khae, bahu sapute ganti jae (The husband has deserted the wife/ The maternal uncle has sold his niece in order to eat/ The mother-in-law bakes bread, the father-in-law eats it, while the daughter-in-law counts minutely each mouthful swallowed.)'[26] The song notably combines the multiple misfortunes to which a woman was subject in times of crisis: not just a heightening of nutritional deprivation and bias, but also abandonment and sexual betrayal by appointed male protectors. (That the abandonment of women was not particular to India is borne out by Megan Vaughan's work on famine in Malawi; 1949, the year of the famine, is remembered in women's songs as the year of 'many divorces'.[27]) Bina Agarwal notes, moreover, that the assets that are first sold in times of alimentary crisis – jewellery, household utensils, and small animals – are the ones most likely to be owned by women, while land, which is almost invariably in men's names, is the last asset to be disposed of. Besides, women's already limited employment opportunities are further reduced in famine conditions; it is usually men who migrate in search of paid employment.[28] The usual sexual exploitation of peasant women by powerful males, including landlords and moneylenders, has also tended to intensify under conditions of crisis. In every famine, many women and girls were kidnapped, or sold – usually by family members – into prostitution; the numbers of girls who were sold, or who sold themselves, were particularly large in the famine of 1350/1943.[29]

Perhaps more chillingly than any other scholar Paul Greenough has demonstrated the ways in which the famine of 1350/1943 was marked by ethical dilemmas and gendered calculations. Noting the seeming anomaly of a famine that was characterized by high mortality rates but a remarkably low rate of public disorder or crime (commentators, both British and Indian, were befuddled by the seeming passivity of the hungry millions), he suggests that the Bengali response to famine was in fact not passive but fairly deliberate and egregiously gendered. In this crisis food was deliberately channelled towards young and middle-aged adult married males (men traditionally occupying the position of the *karta*, or the master of the household) and withheld from dependents (women, *jajmani* clients, subjects, and, occasionally, children). Though this violated Bengali ideals of nurture, protection, and reciprocity (and engendered the symptoms of masculine guilt and ambivalence towards women that we shall examine below), the greater good of sustaining patriliny was preserved through an invocation of *apad-dharma* (the morality of distress/crisis, when ordinary duties are in abeyance). This permitted a simultaneous adherence to moral order and to male self-interest; indeed, the two were not perceived as contradictory. As Greenough succinctly puts it, 'This was an adaptation, …., which succeeded only by imposing mortality upon some persons in order to secure the survival of others. In the European tradition, famine violence was turned 'outward' and 'upward' against offending landlords, merchants, and officials; in Bengal the tradition was to turn the violence 'inward' and 'downward' against clients and dependents. This was the cold violence of abandonment, of ceasing to nourish, rather than of bloodshed and tumult'.[30]

ALLEGORIES OF FAMINE

The famine of 1350/1943 yielded an ironically rich harvest of fiction, poetry, art, ethnography, and film in Bangla and in English. (Only a few of them can be discussed here.) 'It would be hard', says Nikhil Sarkar, 'to find a writer in Bengali from those times who had not written a story against the setting of the famine'.[31] Among the best known of these were Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay (*Manvantar* [1944]), Gopal Haldar (*Terosho Panchash*), Manik Bandyopadhyay ('*Aaj Kal Porshur Golpo*' [1963]), Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay (*Asani Sanket*), Bijon Bhattacharya (*Nabanna* [1944]), Kamalkumar Majumdar (*Khelar Pratibha* [1977]), Sarojkumar Roychaudhury (*Kalo Ghoda*), and Syed Waliullah ('Nayanchara'). To these we can adduce the English-language fiction of Bhabani Bhattacharya (*So Many Hungers*! [1947], *He Who Rides a Tiger* [1954]) and Ela Sen (*Darkening Days* [1944]). The event also inspired a number of artists and illustrators – Zainul Abedin, Chittaprosad, Ramkinkar, Gopen Roy, and Gobardhan Ash – whose sketches and paintings are inseparable from our sense of the iconography of the famine. In subsequent decades it also produced some notable Bangla films – Mrinal Sen's *Baishey Shravan* (1960) and *Akaler Sandhaney* and Satyajit Ray's *Asani Sanket*.[32]

The famine was perhaps the first one in subcontinental history to have produced any significant ethnographies of the sufferers (though there were songs, stories, fiction, and popular memories of earlier famines, including that of 1770). Relatively little can be said with any accuracy about the social profile of the famine victims; their age, caste, gender, marital status, and occupation remain, for the most part, unknown to posterity. Record-keeping on this score, never reliable at the best of times, was thrown into further disarray as a result of the disturbances induced by famine. In the absence of comprehensive information about the sufferers of famine, scholars have relied upon information about relief recipients as a way of arriving at generalizations about the victims as a whole.[33] It was these ethnographies of relief recipients and of other famine refugees, especially in Calcutta, that helped popularize a gendered script of the famine; this was supplemented by the cognate efforts of journalists, novelists, playwrights, artists, and filmmakers. The most notable of these was a survey of famine victims in Calcutta, supervised by Tarakchandra Das of the Anthropology Department at Calcutta University.[34] This survey's findings constituted one of the most prominent narratives of the famine experience – it was cited by the *Famine Inquiry Commission Report on Bengal* as well as by less august bodies and individuals – and of its gendered character in particular. It discovered a preponderance of women, especially married women (and particularly in the 15–60 age group) over men among the Calcutta destitutes, despite the higher percentage of males in the population of Bengal. It also noted the relatively small number of girls aged 10 to 15 among the destitutes, and concluded, persuasively, that they had been absorbed into a rapidly increasing sex trade in Calcutta. And, significantly, it reproduced the common wisdom about comparative gendered mortality in famines, noting that 'the high mortality of males during famine is a common feature of all the famines which occurred in different parts of India since 1877'.[35] In 1943, it concluded, 'for every dead woman there are nearly two dead men'.[36] Another chronicler of the famine, Kali Charan Ghosh, noted this asymmetry as a very sinister and significant feature of the mortality figures'.[37] It is only recently that Amartya Sen has drawn attention to the biases in Das's sample survey of destitutes, and has suggested that the differences in mortality rates over the 1943–46 period are in fact rather small.[38] This may well be true; indeed, there is little reason to doubt it. But be the details of mortality what they may, the juxtaposition of female helplessness/victimization and female resilience (noted as 'sinister') certainly speaks to the ideological admixture of paternalist compassion and misogyny that attends the feminine iconography of the famine.

To most commentators the famine represented not simply a crisis of subsistence but the onset of a social breakdown unparalleled in its scope. The Bengali perception that the famine marked the passing of an idyllic *shonar Bangla* (golden Bengal) was also a notably gendered sense of loss and grief: Greenough notes the distinctly maternal aspects of a landscape whose desolation the famine concretized in the most fearsome way.[39] The sense of horror and shame that attended the realization of the ethical failures that attended the famine was likewise a markedly masculine one. Nikhil Sarkar's account of the shame associated with the famine is unmistakably embedded in a certain notion of masculine duty: 'Our heads go down in shame and humiliation when we go through the columns of newspapers from those times, and focus on a news item from Netrakona in Mymensingh reporting 'girls on sale for ten annas to a rupee and a half per head'; or another from the village Kodalia in Manikgunge, reporting that Laloo Rajbanshi and his wife have sold their daughter to a prostitute for the sum of ten rupees'.[40] This rough passage out of a pastoral landscape marked by social order, maternal nurturance, and well-being into a world of social turmoil, a weakened sense of gendered duty and obligation, urban alienation, and market economies coalesced repeatedly around the female figure. Commentator after commentator praised in extravagant terms the virtues of a self-abnegating Bengali (Hindu) womanhood, one rendered profoundly vulnerable and endangered as a result of the famine. Among the most fulsome of them was T.K. Dutt, who proclaimed,

> There is no parallel in the world to the Bengali women in their homely virtues, particularly the virtue of self-sacrifice. . . . A foreigner can never imagine to what extent a Bengali mother can sacrifice herself for the sake of her child or a Bengali wife can surrender her comforts and liberties to please her husband or a Bengali sister can forget all her joys and pleasures to make her brother happy. It is really a fact that all the human virtues in the world have been concentrated in Indian womanhood and not in Indian manhood, not because man has always played the tyrant and woman, the victim, but because there is something in the blood of Indian womanhood which makes them angels on earth as compared with the entire sisterhood of the world.[41]

More temperate observers also underlined the tragedy by casting it as a blow to motherhood. Kali Charan Ghosh describes the undoing of an intensely matrifocal world: 'There is the mother, the centre of humble homes, round whom revolves the whole family world.... What has happened to this home? .... The mother is dead'.[42] What are we to make of a seemingly simple declarative statement such as the following: 'The mother is dead'? In part it is a notation of a literal self-effacement by mothers for the maintenance of patriarchal order, and their own physical and reproductive extermination: 'With the first approach of scarcity she sacrificed herself bit by bit to keep all others in their proper places in the family and the society. There are a few still living who are devoid of health and are too enfeebled to bear the future generation'.[43] But the mother's death is more than a literal one. In some instances at least the proximity of female suffering and female culpability is quite marked, as the following tortured sentence suggests: 'Outwardly, the motherly instinct has disclosed in its ugliness where the primordial necessity made it appear in its most hideous form' (sic).[44] These 'hideous form[s]' – the selling and slaughter of her offspring – that motherhood has assumed in the new dispensation are, however, mere excrescences over the cast of true motherhood, concealing a tenderness for the child's welfare: 'the real mother has never failed her'.[45] But even as he asserts this, the author fears that true, that is to say, self-sacrificing motherhood/womanhood has been fatally undermined and rendered a 'shadow' of itself under the onslaught of famine: 'The mother who has not the strength to weep or sob out of sheer exhaustion, who had not a drop of tear in her shrivelled body to shed for the dead child, whose finer sentiments and feelings have been smothered for want of proper expression, who would prefer death every moment to a miserable helpless existence, will fail to serve the society and to meet its multifarious demands'.[46] Famine is the testing-ground of motherhood itself, and it is clear that not all mothers have been adequate to its challenge. The slide in the sentence from sympathy to unease, from a focus on lack of bodily strength to the extirpation of 'finer sentiments' in mothers (and the implications of such an extirpation for gendered social utility) is a noticeable one. It is hardly surprising that this passage in Ghosh is followed by two tales of maternal breakdown during the famine. Both tales are about failures of maternal sentiment and maternal self-denial: one involves indifference to the corpse of one's own child, and the other a privileging of maternal hunger over the sufferings of the child. The latter, in particular, was to become one of the archetypal tales of 1350/1943, being reproduced in Bhabani Bhattacharya's novel *So Many Hungers*! and in many other accounts of the famine. Coupled with these are reports of women and girls selling themselves and being sold (sometimes by their mothers) into prostitution. Ghosh anticipates both a rise in prostitution among surviving women and, notably, a decrease in caste Hindu numbers as a result of the ritual prohibition against widow remarriage.[47] (The question of demographic decline cannot but have been a fraught question in the era of Muslim League ministries in Calcutta, the spectre of Pakistan, and the relatively recent revelation – to a hitherto complacent Hindu *bhadralok* population – of a sizeable Muslim plurality in Bengal.) The question of specifically female suffering is inseparable in this instance from questions of physical and social reproduction, and of patriliny and purity.

The centrality of female suffering was also notably emphasized in the visual iconography of the famine. The sketches (brush drawings in black ink on paper) of Zainul Abedin, then lecturer at the Government College of Art in Calcutta and one of the pioneers of modernism in Bengali art, were perhaps pre-eminent among them (see figures 1–5). They appeared in the daily *Swadhinata* as well as in other newspapers and periodicals from Calcutta; eleven of them were reproduced in Ela Sen's *Darkening Days* (1944), a set of short stories about the famine. Abedin's sketches, marked by economy, a certain confidence of stroke, and an unusual lack of sentimentality, combine the conventions of Bengali folk art with those of European Expressionism. They tend to showcase skeletal mothers and children in urban landscapes, begging for food, sitting or lying in despair beside an empty plate, or reduced to scavenging for scraps with dogs and crows. Often the dustbin that forms the backdrop for this destitution is represented as high and forbidding, like a fortress; the ubiquitous crows, often nearly as large as the children by whom they are poised, are well-fed and aggressive. It is not always clear whether they are competitors with humans for food or whether they feast directly on human flesh; Nikhil Sarkar has suggested that they represent the black marketeers for whom the famine was an extremely profitable experience.[48] Abedin's compatriots such as Prankrishna Pal and Sunilmadhab Sen (figures 6 and 7) also favour maternal subjects, though their figures are far more monumental and self-consciously uplifting than Abedin's; they serve less as direct representations of female suffering than as memorials to a cult of motherhood made popular by the events of 1350/1943.[49]

Most of the contemporary photographs, and their accompanying captions, of the famine sufferers in the newspapers – the *Statesman*, the *Hindusthan Standard*, and the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* – were also of female, especially maternal, sufferers. The accompanying photographs from the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* and the *Hindusthan Standard* (figures 8–10) are fairly typical, both in their portraits of individual sufferers and in the sentimental captions ('Nothing for me, mother dear?' 'A human flower blasted by the hot breath of Famine') that they utilize. In one unusual photograph from the *Hindusthan Standard*, a very young mother, little older than the children on her lap and beside her, looks bleakly and unflinchingly at the camera. But in the other four photographs reproduced here, the destitute mother (in three instances out of four the mother of a male child) looks away from the photographer, seemingly absorbed in the drama of infantile suffering in front of her. In three of the photographs, an audience of mostly male legs and feet (one set clad in shoes and mostly turned towards the camera), testifying to the presence of other watchers of these poorly clad women (only one is fully covered), alerts the viewer to her co-implication in a voyeuristic scene. But even the scenes of these Niobe-like figures are not without their ambivalences. The lone mother who eats (presumably without feeding her emaciated son, who looks longingly at a dish of food) is a figure marked by the unease that attends representations of maternal consumption (rather than maternal sacrifice). It comes as no surprise that she is, of all the figures reproduced here, the most unfeminine and animal-like in appearance, with unkempt hair, bared teeth, no covering on her upper body, and a hunched posture.

BENGALI MADONNAS

While such photographs played a significant role in raising popular and official awareness about the famine, they were also accused of pandering to a taste for lurid sensationalism. Bijon Bhattacharya, whose play about the famine, *Nabanno*, was a key text in the formation of a radical theatre movement in India, comments caustically upon bourgeois (and largely Anglophone) photographers' zeal to produce the kinds of sensational yet sentimental pictures that will raise circulation numbers for their newspapers. After commenting bitterly upon the destitutes' unwillingness to stand still for photographs, one of the photographers decides that filming the 'mob' (in English in the original) is a waste of film, and that 'models' (also in English in the original) must be carefully chosen for the right effect. Not surprisingly, he lights upon a beggar woman with an infant. But her expression is too morose for journalistic effect. He lights upon the device of paying her a small sum of money, so that he can raise a smile upon her features and name his picture 'Banglar Madonna' (The Bengali madonna). Once the picture is taken (and the doubled circulation of his newspaper as well as the goodwill of his boss assured), he has little interest in his model, and dismisses her: ‘Leave now, child, leave. Go. You’ve got your money. Go now’.[50] Bhattacharya’s anatomization of the bourgeois commodification of the famine image is incisive. It is interesting, however, to compare the representation of the exchange with the Bengali madonna with a second exchange that follows with the old man Prodhan, whom the photographer names ‘the great patriarch’, since it adheres to a script of female suffering and male critique/protest/conscientization. The female beggar has been shown to be largely mute, uncomprehending, and abject; the only time that she speaks (in addition to saying ‘no’ to the photographer’s question about whether she has received from the relief kitchen) is to beg for money for her son’s sake (‘It’s not for me, babu, it’s for this baby. Have mercy, sir’). The exchange with Prodhan on the other hand is full, satirical, and acutely reflexive about class and exploitation. Prodhan accepts money for posing, just as the beggar woman does, but he does not beg; and he is, unlike her, both ironic and self-aware. He questions the photographers minutely about the commodification of the photographs, gives them instructions about when to shoot, and understands thoroughly the implications of their transaction with him (‘That’s good, an enterprise for producing pictures of the destitute*! [ta bhalo, kangaler chhobir karobar*].’[51] As it turns out, the photographer’s chosen appellations for these two figures – the Bengali madonna and the great patriarch – are not altogether wide of the mark.[52]

Nabanna has become famous for its role in the emergence of a politically committed and thematically realistic theatre in Bengal, a form that was soon to become the dominant one in Bengali theatre in the subsequent decades. It was produced by the Indian People’s Theatre Association (IPTA), the first organized progressive theatre movement on a national scale and one of the front organizations of the Communist Party of India that had until recently been proscribed by the colonial state.[53] Directed by the author and by Shombhu Mitra, it featured a largely amateur cast and modest sets when it opened in October 1944. It told the story of a relatively well-to-do peasant family – consisting of Prodhan Samaddar, his wife Panchanoni, and his nephews Kunjo and Niranjan and their wives Binodini and Radhika – contending with the effects of hoarding, a black market in rice, and the extortionary purchase of peasant landholdings. Reduced to beggary and starvation, they reach Calcutta, where they encounter brothel owners, black marketeers in rice, unsympathetic rich people, and opportunistic photographers, all of whom are bent upon exploiting them. But by the end of the narrative, they have returned to their land and have determined to work as a collective upon the new harvest that awaits them. The play was an immediate and extraordinary success, among audiences and newspaper reviewers alike; its departures from the conventional literary language, elaborate stagecraft, and conventional romantic and feudal themes of Bangla theatre were both unprecedented and timely. ‘In content and form’, says Kironmoy Raha, ‘*Nabanna* blazed the trail of a new theatrical idiom’.[54] Produced out of a passionate sympathy for the plight of the famine destitutes, and remarkable in its insistence upon assigning an activist and transformative role to its peasant characters, it established a blueprint for realist representation not just for Bangla or IPTA produced theatre but for Indian radical theatre in general. Its use of peasant characters, homely sets, and the politically timely themes of famine, dispossession, and exploitation were widely copied, as were its forms of allegorically inflected and dialect-saturated realism.

In her study of the political theatre of Bengal, Himani Bannerji has taken *Nabanna* to task precisely for its modes of realism. She suggests, with considerable perspicacity, that the play had the effect that it did upon its contemporary middle-class audiences (we do not know if it was played before peasant audiences, and what they thought of it) because its use of dialect effectively camouflaged the fact that 'what passed for the peasants' reality was the middle-class version of the rural world'.[55] What Bannerji suggests about the play's unwitting class politics is even more emphatically true of its representations of gender. As was true for many of his male contemporaries, Bhattacharya's sense of the famine as a gendered event and a gendered challenge was notable; his favoured icon of the famine was that of the dead mother with a baby at her breast. The famine, moreover, sharpened his sense of his playwright's calling, which henceforth he likened to that of a mother, who could provide succour of a variety not obtainable any longer from the legions of Bengal's dead women.[56] It is perhaps this iconic investment in maternity that makes for his partiality for allegorical scenes and characters in *Nabanna*, especially those involving women. Among the most notable of these is Prodhan's wife, Panchanoni, a figure of generalized inspiration, incitement, and rebellion. She functions as a kind of a vatic figure, entering and exiting with rapidity, and issuing proclamations and challenges without pausing for a reply. Her utterances, too, are highly abstract in character, enunciations of principle and avowals of crisis rather than the exposition of particulars. In this she shares a good deal with the figure of 'female incitement' that Kumkum Sangari has analyzed so superbly: 'if incitement is to carry an inspirational connotation, women must neither *name* the social relation they are trying to preserve nor present it as a personal or material interest; they can only name the *abstraction* – family, honour, religion, nation – to which that social relation is either directly attached or which mediates it'.[57] Thus, unlike the other, lesser women who merely quarrel with their husbands or express terror at the possibility of abandonment, Panchanoni brushes aside the fact of hunger as a paltry detail and speaks instead on behalf of, and about, two signal abstractions: womanhood and honour/chastity. Her rhetorical contribution is to characterize the famine as a crisis of failed masculinity and the threat to female honour/chastity: 'Why should I endure this misfortune on account of your incapacity? What crimes have women committed? .... I have not had even a bit of straw to chew upon these last three days, understand? We can stand bodily suffering. That is nothing. But shame! modesty! the ornaments of Indian womanhood, upon which you pride yourself! And, above all, *izzat*/chastity! A woman's *izzat*/chastity! You have nothing to say, I see'.[58] This call to reclaim a lost male honour expands her field of analysis beyond the village to take on Indian womanhood itself. As a rhetorical set piece it is entirely self-contained, even though it is nominally addressed to Kunjo. It is only after she has exited, after fixing Kunjo with a glare of accusation, that he can attempt to stutter out a reply (which is no reply at all). A little later she is shown expiring in the midst of urging her fellow-villagers to persist in struggle against the violence of their oppressors. As in the case of the harangue about *izzat*, it is not entirely clear what the struggle is about, though it appears that it might involve increasing landlessness among the peasants.

(The recurrent 'extra-diegetic' sound of the splitting of bamboos suggests the destruction of peasant holdings.) Like the earlier incitement, this too involves some degree of public shaming, though without specific content; her own exhortation, which she chants repeatedly, are a broadly inspirational 'Go forward' (*egiye ja*). Rather than the fetishization of empiricism (manifested mostly in the use of dialect) that Bannerji anathematizes, such a passage manifests some of the allegorical forms of bourgeois Bengali theatre; yet both modes have the effect of reproducing middle-class conventions of class and gender.

As in the case of *Nabanna*, hunger, famine, and female suffering assume in Bhabani Bhattacharya's *So Many Hungers!* a certain metaphorical status, signifying oppression, longing, and transformation in a world marked by multiple crises of value. Also like Bhattacharya's play, *So Many Hungers!* was written, as the author's testimony tells us, as a document of crisis: 'Then the great famine swept down upon Bengal. The emotional stirrings I felt (more than two million men, women and children died of slow starvation amid a man-made scarcity) were a sheer compulsion to creativity. The result was the novel *So Many Hungers!*'[59] The plot is made up of two distinct yet intersecting strands, one featuring the conscientization of the urban, westernized, upper middle-class scientist Rahoul, and the other the traumas of the village girl Kajoli, who suffers starvation, home-lessness, rape, miscarriage, and a close encounter with prostitution, but who nonetheless retains her integrity and her faith. In such a landscape, hunger encompasses but is not limited to alimentary needs; the novel represents a whole range of human hungers – for domestic life, for social prestige, for knowledge, for political freedom, for wealth, and even for rapacious sex.

In such a novel woman represents not just the experience of hunger but also its fulfilment. Indeed not just famine but historical transformation itself is inaugurated through the feminine, through the figure of childbirth and mothering. The announcement of the beginning of the Second World War is partnered with the birth of Rahoul's daughter. An implicit parallel is drawn between the 'hard, heavy pains' of labour ('as it should be,' we are told by Rahoul's mother) that are necessary to the introduction of new life, and the force of war, required to cleanse Fascist Germany and Imperial Britain of fascism and imperialism. The novel has a fairly conventional gendered cast, being divided among men who are active and enlightened or active and perfidious, and women who are figures of sacrifice and suffering. The moral centre of the novel is Rahoul's grandfather Devash Basu (rechristened Devata – like Mahatma – by his adoring village brethren). Like Gandhi he disavows privilege, instructs the humble villagers against the wiles of profiteers and in the gospel of khadi and non-violence, and achieves national fame through a hunger strike against the Raj. It is curious, however, that one of the significant details of the famine experience – the abandonment of women by male protectors – is never broached by the novel. The men are absent, it is true, but only for unimpeachable reasons: they are either dead or they are imprisoned for the nationalist cause.[60] Despite Kishore's mysterious disappearance, and his jesting talk about the attractions of city women, his wife Kajoli and her mother never suspect that he might have abandoned them.

The women on the other hand have enormous symbolic centrality but are not, unlike Rahoul, the subjects of moral conflict, conscientization, or transformation.[61] It is not for nothing that the peasant mother, mother of Kajoli and Onu, is named only 'the mother' (as is Rahoul's own mother; his father and grandfather, on the other hand, are named). Most prominently in her case but also in that of others, 'mother' is meant to function as an honorific for heroically self-abnegating femininity. Motherhood, however, is not, or not always, a simple phenomenon; it is a complex and charged experience. Chapter 12 of the novel provides an apt summation of the dilemmas of motherhood. It commences with the peasant mother looking for pasturage for Mangala the cow. That Mangala a figure for Bengali motherhood is underscored for us with a fairly insistent literalism: 'Mangala, … was no animal to those children; she had become human for them by their long association and fondness. They had grown up on her milk' (p. 105). But like all maternal figures in the novel, Mangala is destined for a greater sacrifice, as the peasant mother comes upon a scene which was one of the archetypal scenes of famine: a starving young mother burying her infant son alive. The scene is a highly coloured one, though not without its nuances. The older woman reacts with horror to this unnatural femininity ('Witch! Murdering a child! Your own! What hell would hold the like of thee? Witch!'). The younger woman, on the other hand, oscillates between tenderness for a child she can no longer support and a cognitive numbness that makes her oblivious to morality and to her own surroundings. It is perhaps significant that she is never identified as a mother. Maternal sacrifice is thus always shadowed by its doubles: maternal neglect, maternal abandonment, and maternal infanticide. It is fitting then that such maternal perfidy be redeemed by a superabundance of maternal sacrifice as a corrective: both Mangala and the rice are given up to the would-be killer of the male infant, so that she and her child might survive. As if to test her maternal mettle even further, the mother then encounters another mother of an adolescent daughter, who makes a prophecy of deliverance from famine: 'You, too, will eat one day, for you have a daughter' (p. 111). This is immediately followed by a confrontation with procurers from Calcutta, who seek to buy Kajoli's body with gifts of food. The mother spurns them; but the unremitting replay of temptation and conflict underscores the profound vulnerability of motherhood in a time of corporeal and ethical crisis.

At other points motherhood, like hunger, is invested with allegorical resonance so that it comes to signify a certain ethical continuum rather than the literal condition of having and raising children. In one of his peregrinations through the city, Rahoul comes upon a scene that functions as one such allegorical moment. A young destitute woman exposes herself before white soldiers for the payment of a few rupees. Curious about her, Rahoul follows her after her act. He discovers her buying large quantities of bread, which she then distributes with great attentiveness to her fellow destitutes, who hail her as mother:

> The destitutes sat up, faces eager and joyous, and they cried thinly, 'The mother!'
> 'She is back, the mother', the words tossed about. 'Our own mother, she is back.'
> It was strange how their lips loved to call the young girl mother (p. 164).

Through the anxious – and repeated – incantation of the talismanic term, 'mother,' what had appeared – to white soldiers, the leering shopkeeper, and even to Rahoul – as a sexual spectacle is recoded as the sacrificial manifestation of the maternal instinct (which is here definitionally non-sexual). While the sale of the body to satisfy one's own appetite for food (or for sex) is morally dubious, it can nonetheless be set to work appropriately for a communal good; appetite can be deflected into an act of altruism where the young woman, as mother, suffers for all. Nonetheless there are a number of curious details that mark this scene, which proliferates almost as many questions and stresses as it answers. Do the recipients of the young woman's charity know or guess how their daily bread is procured? And what of the nocturnal wanderer Rahoul, who haunts the same places as the foreign soldiers seeking Indian female flesh? He longs and fears to find Kajoli in every sexualized young woman he encounters. He becomes, like the soldiers, a voyeur in the face of the unnamed young woman's stripping and, after her act, he follows her stealthily for reasons he cannot fully explain to himself ('an irresistible impulse'). While the scene of maternal feeding that follows putatively cancels out both her sexual traffic and Rahoul's voyeurism, it cannot but underscore the profoundly anxious character of the novel's investment in maternity.

The two major Bengali-language films – Satyajit Ray's *Asani Sanket* and Mrinal Sen's *Akaler Sandhaney* – have also tended to highlight the gendered experience, including the gendered dilemmas, of the famine. Of the two, Ray's most closely approximates the gendered models established by *Nabanna* and *So Many Hungers*! It tells the story of a rural Brahmin couple in the days leading up to the famine. Gangacharan, who functions as a priest and village schoolmaster, enjoys the privileges attendant upon being the sole Brahmin male in the village; and his devoted and beautiful young wife, Ananga, is grateful for the relative prosperity they enjoy in their new home. The war, and its attendant famine, is signalled by fighter planes flying overhead, the appearance of destitutes from neighbouring villages, and the disappearance of rice from the market. Gangacharan travels far and wide in search of rice, while Ananga searches with other village women for roots and tubers. Her friend Chhutki is driven by hunger to sleep with a scarfaced stranger who has ample stores of rice, but Ananga would rather starve than take such a step. As the film draws to a close on one of the emblematic images of the famine – that of a mass of people on the road to Calcutta – Ananga informs Gangacharan of her pregnancy.[62]

Ananga is quite emphatically an emblem of the goddess Lakshmi, iconically and narratively.[63] More than once, the camera tracks between her and an image of Lakshmi on the wall of her hut. While the scheming old Brahmin who avails of her hospitality may have opportunistic reasons for addressing her as 'Ma Lokkhi', he is not mistaken in hailing her as such. The film returns repeatedly to scenes where Ananga is feeding her husband or her guests, often sacrificing her own meals in order to do so. Unlike her shrewd and calculating husband, she is generous despite the experience of dearth, and relatively indifferent to hunger; while her female companions search for roots, she is entranced by the beauty of a flower. What should be her own bodily experience of hunger – she is pregnant after all, and her skills at procuring snails and roots are quite rudimentary – is displaced instead on to her friend Chhutki, whose fall from feminine grace in a lurid subplot involving a mysterious and hideously scarred male stranger, is detailed with uncharacteristic (for Ray, that is) melodramatic intensity. That some of this indifference might be the result of Brahmin privilege is not discounted: as the film shows us, Brahmins are sometimes accommodated where other hungry people are turned away. (And Ananga is entirely aware of her Brahmin status, as we know from her refusal to have bodily contact with her low-caste/dalit acquaintance Moti, who has come to visit her.) And yet – as the counter-example of her relatively small-minded husband demonstrates – her capacity for sacrifice transcends caste. In fact, one of the primary manifestations of Gangacharan's enlightenment is his realization of his wife's consistent and uncomplaining sacrifice of her own appetite. Her pregnancy, hinted at through much of the film but only announced at the end, only confirms her in her status as madonna.

Perhaps the most compelling and unsentimental representation of the famine of 1350/1943 is Mrinal Sen's *Akaler Sandhaney*, a part-documentary, part-fictional work that examines a committed and progressive young director's endeavour to represent cinematically the events of 1943. A 'cautionary tale about the leftist intellectual's obsession with subalterns', *Akaler Sandhaney* anatomizes the formal and ethical dimensions of cinematic engagement with the other, in particular the gendered and rural other.[64] The director travels with his crew to a Bengal village to shoot a film on the famine. The crew arrives in buses and cars, lustily singing IPTA songs of peasant resistance; the camera cuts from them to an elderly male peasant, serving a temporary choric function: 'The city folk have come to take pictures of the famine. The famine's all over us'. The members of the crew ensconce themselves in a dilapidated old mansion which still shelters a dying old man and his wife, who has memories of 1943. In one notable scene, the crew examines famine pictures from different eras, trying but failing to distinguish between one famine and another. Various troubles erupt on the set and off it. The film crew's lavish consumption (of expensive cigarettes, chicken, fried rice) raises the price of food in the village, and they are accused of starting a new famine. An actress, slated to play the role of Malati, a character who has turned to sexwork for survival, leaves for Calcutta. In the meanwhile, a poor local woman, Durga, comes to see herself in the role that the actress Smita Patil is playing – that of a young wife and mother accused by her husband of selling her body for food. While the director seeks to replace the departed actress with a local young woman, perhaps Durga, the villagers become suspicious and hostile. The director and his crew are forced to return to Calcutta. The film ends with a succession of shots of Durga, starting with a close-up and ending with an extreme long shot; the voice-over tells us that she has lost her son and been abandoned by her husband.[65]

Perhaps more powerfully than in any other film of his, Sen demonstrates the ways in which history is a textile of traumatic repetitions, continuities, and eruptions into the present. He underscores this through a number of devices – through photographic citations of historical famine moments that directly mimic the work of the camera in the present; through visual and narrative quotations of *Khhudito Pashan*, Tagore's famous meditation on history, women's suffering, and haunting; and through an old peasant's repeated assertions that famine continues very emphatically into the present. As in the case of the other writers, filmmakers, ethnographers, and photographers discussed here, Sen's lens upon the historical experience of famine is an explicitly gendered one; the experience of the famine, and the ethical dilemmas it engenders, are encapsulated in the life-stories of abandoned, isolated, and beleaguered women. But his film is quite distinct from the model that Kelleher suggests, quite correctly, is the usual model for the representation of the horror of famine: 'the unspeakable is characterized as female; again and again, images of women are used to figure moments of breakdown or crisis – in the social body, in political authority, or in representation itself’.[66] Sen brings to this film a long-standing interest in women’s figurative status as subaltern while underlining the limits – sometimes unexpected – of sentimentality as well as of good intentions. As Samik Bandyopadhyay notes in his review of radicalism and gender in Sen’s films, ‘For Sen, in the Indian context at least, it is the woman working for her livelihood who is misunderstood most often, and as often as he can he brings her into a situation where she is the catalyst who exposes the essential illiberality of the middle-class radical. The setting or the feel of history that Sen draws around the situation does not allow one to rest on inferences about the man–woman situation, but makes out of the woman a representative or protagonist of the situation of the exploited’.[67] Thus Durga’s is the face of famine in 1980, as Savitri’s had been in 1943; Sen intercuts sequences from the film featuring Savitri’s involvement in prostitution with ‘real-life’ sequences of Durga’s confrontation with her suspicious husband. The Savitri/Durga plot of women’s experience of famine – in which a woman, driven to despair by her concern for her child and by her husband’s incapacity to provide for her, reluctantly sells her body to a contractor or profiteer from the city in exchange for rice – is a familiar enough one. Neither of these plots, though, is cathected to the notion of honour in ways that we have come to expect. Durga is matter of fact about the serviceability of honour in the face of poverty: ‘When everything’s washed away, will you feed on your honour? .... Didi [Savitri/Smita] did nothing wrong. She wanted to keep her husband alive. Could her husband keep his home?’ What is even more notable is the question of what comes to be identified as ‘prostitution’. The villagers’ resistance to the urban middle-class director’s desire to hire a local woman to play Malati may be, as they claim, a response to their memories of exploitation in 1943 by urban opportunists, sexual predators, and class enemies. And, in a film that deliberately muddies the distinctions between filmscript and ‘real life’, and calls into question what experience is properly one’s own, their responses may not be inapposite. The film, however, does not sentimentalize the villagers (with the possible exception of the schoolmaster); some of them are shown to have profited from the famine as much as the urban contractors and black marketeers. And their notions of honour are the effect of ignorance and of entrenched gender orthodoxies at least as much as of class resistance. The term ‘prostitution’ thus serves to function, as we see in Durga’s case, to stigmatize the woman who transgresses the norms of patriarchal protection; and it is ‘honour’ that brings the famine into her home.

Sen’s film turns upon its head the conventional gendered logic of the feminine fable of famine, seeing honour as it does as one of the causes rather than as the casualty of famine. Even more significantly, it compels our attention to the protocols of reading the crises and predicaments of (gendered) responsibility that the famine highlights. How do we come – like the director and like Smita – to understand a history that is and is not one’s own? How do we acknowledge responsibility not only for what we have done (or refrained from doing), but for what we have witnessed? How do we represent the centrality of female suffering to any account of famine outside of the received languages of honour, patriarchal protection, and pure victimization? How do we come to terms with the limits of our capacity to represent subalternity – of which woman is a favoured instance in Sen’s work, as it is in so much famine literature – without an occultation or sentimentalization of this (non-) subject? These are the questions that Sen poses about the female subject of famine; these are the questions with which he invites us into a ‘politics of difficulty’.[68]

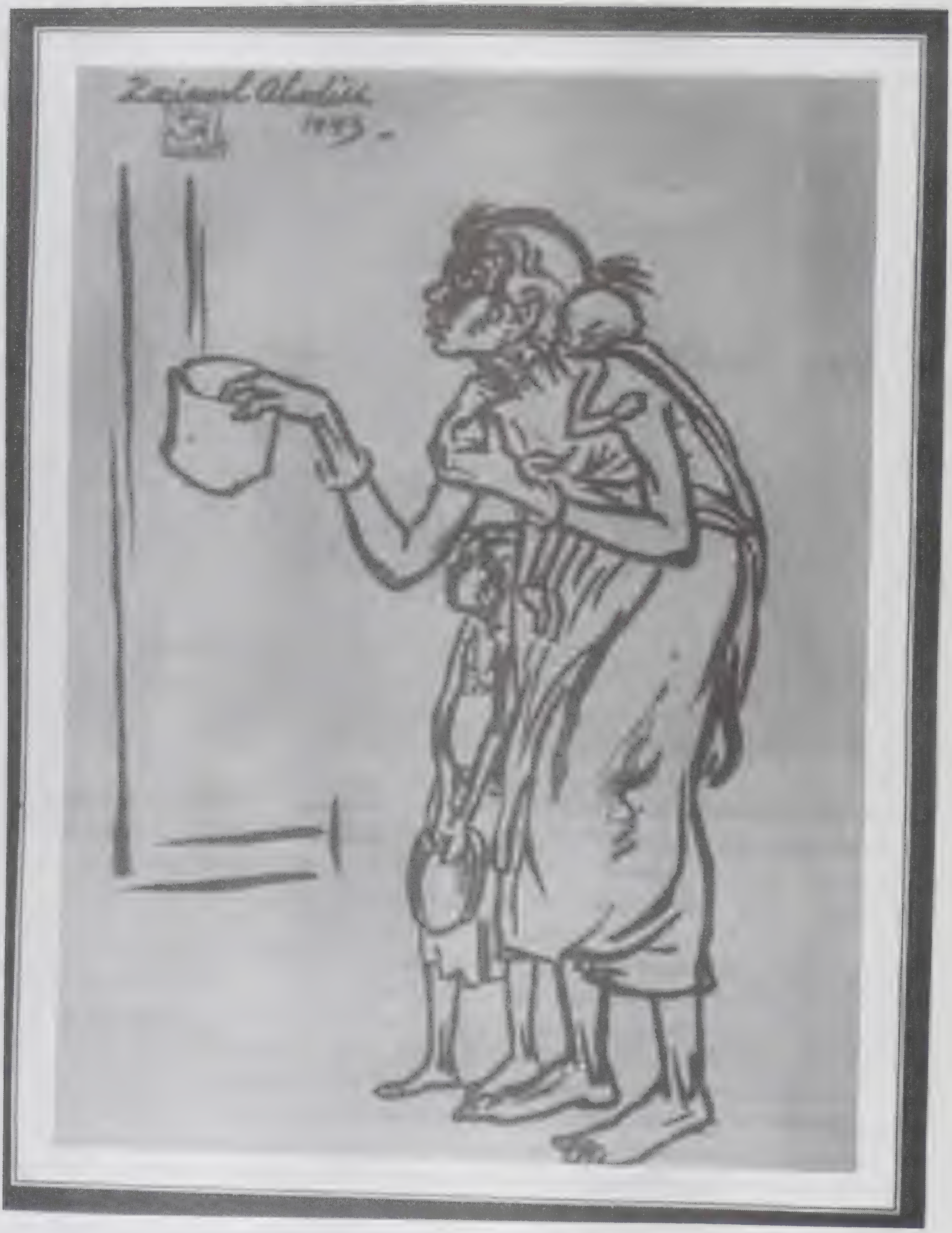

Zainul Abedin
1943

Figure 1. Zainul Abedin, Famine Sketch 1,
Size 40.6 x 58.4 cm, Brush drawings with Indian Ink on tinted paper, 1943

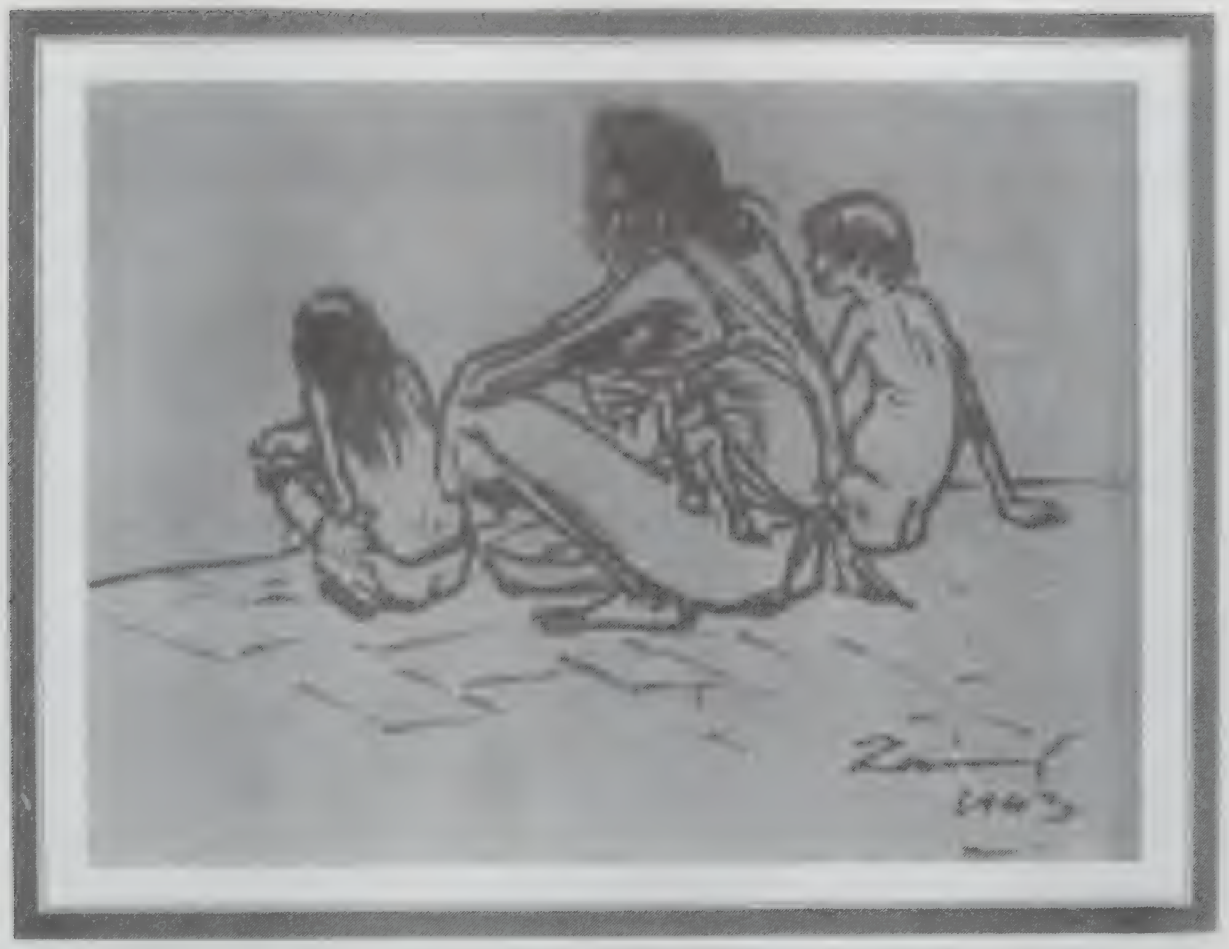


Figure 2. Zainul Abedin, Famine Sketch 2,
Size 40.6 x 58.4 cm, Brush drawings with Indian Ink on tinted paper, 1943

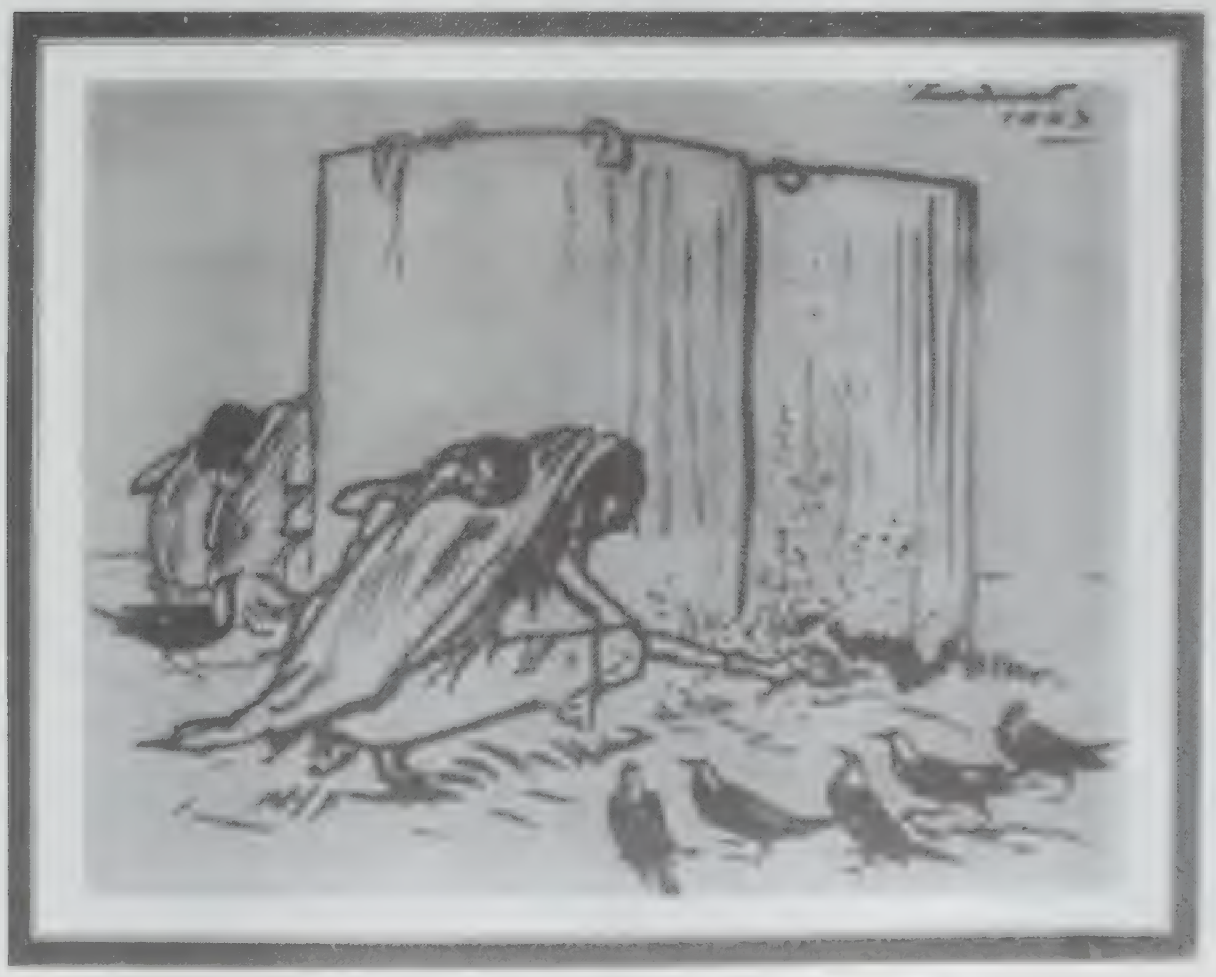


Figure 3. Zainul Abedin, Famine Sketch 3,
Size 40.6 x 58.4 cm, Brush drawings with Indian Ink on tinted paper, 1943

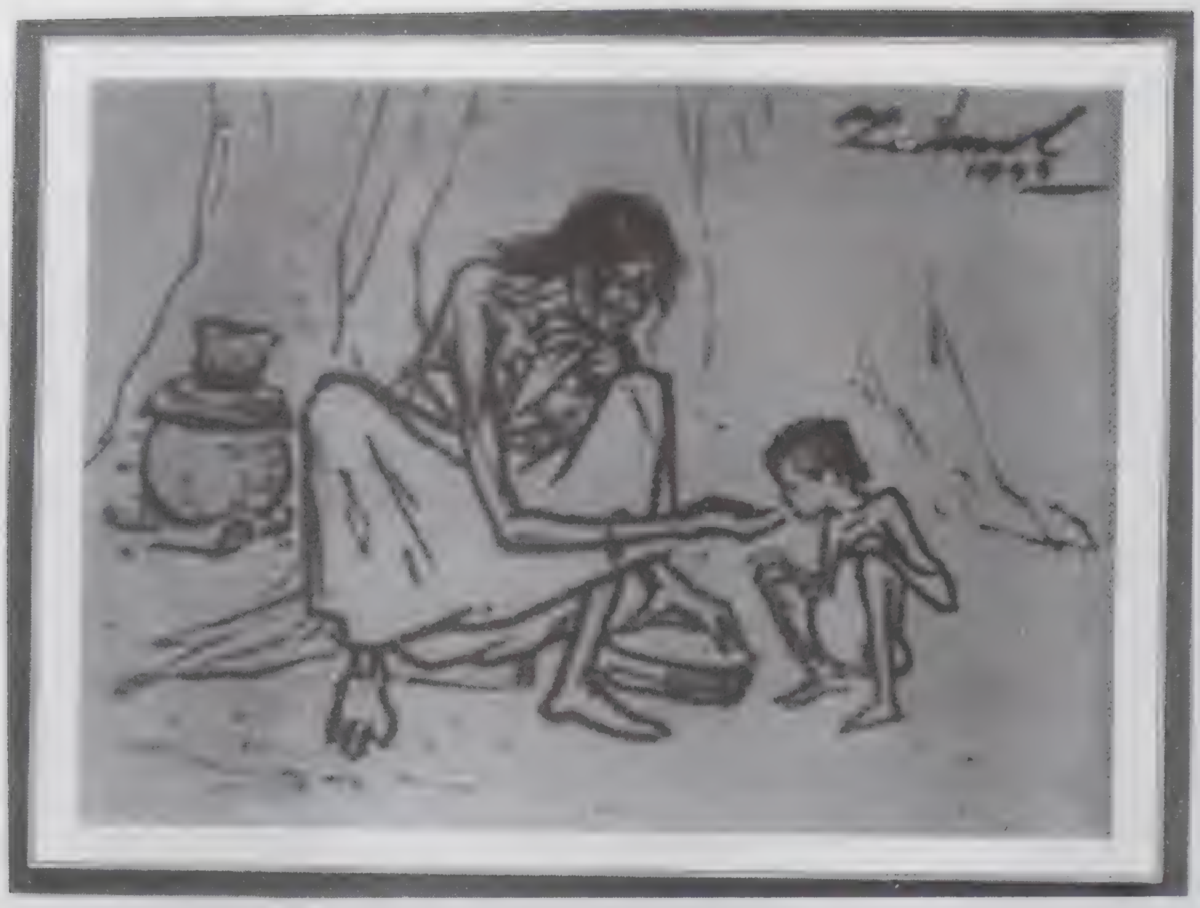


Figure 4. Zainul Abedin, Famine Sketch 4,
Size 40.6 x 58.4 cm, Brush drawings with Indian Ink on tinted paper, 1943

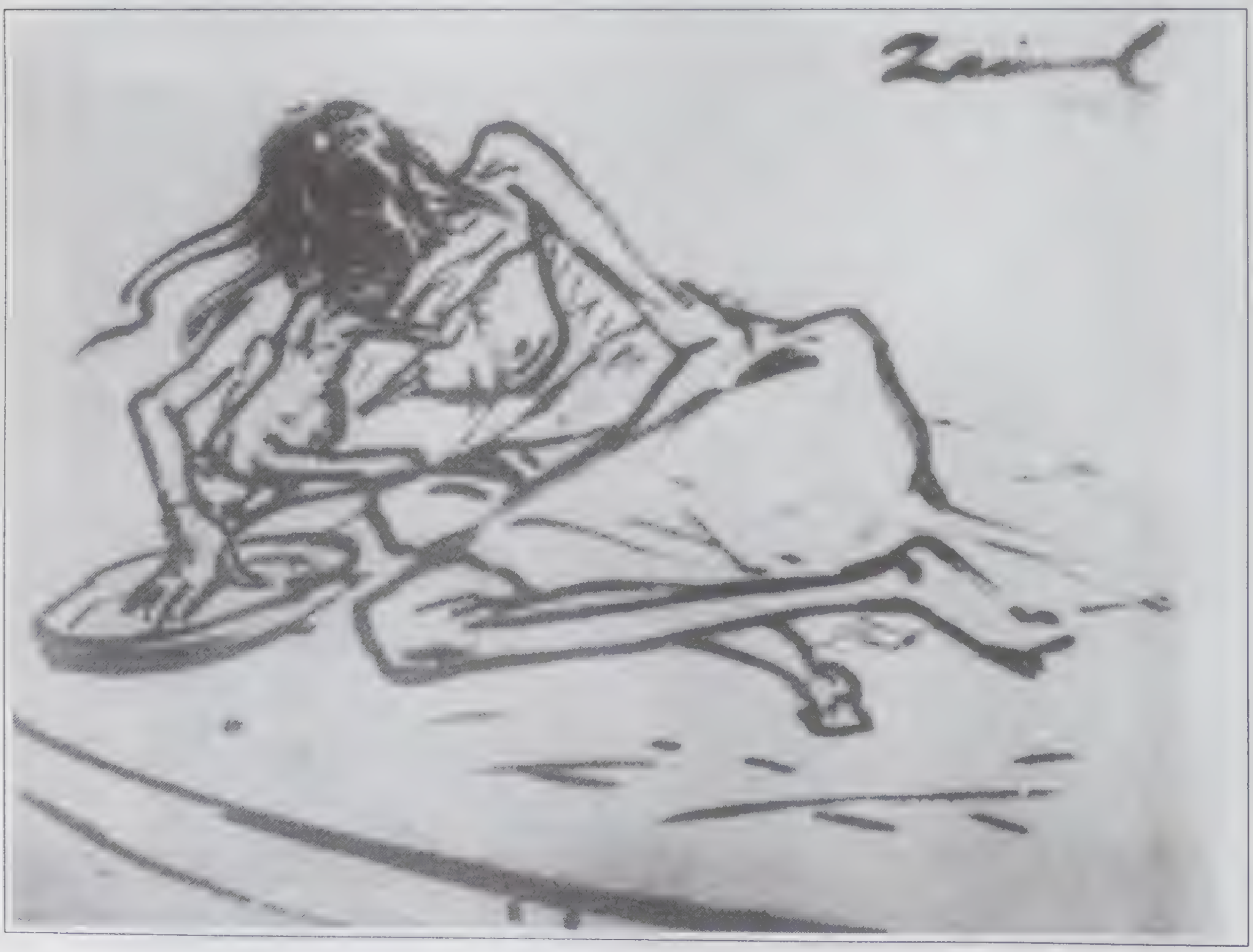


Figure 5. Zainul Abedin, Famine Sketch 5,
Size 40.6 x 58.4 cm, Brush drawings with Indian Ink on tinted paper, 1943

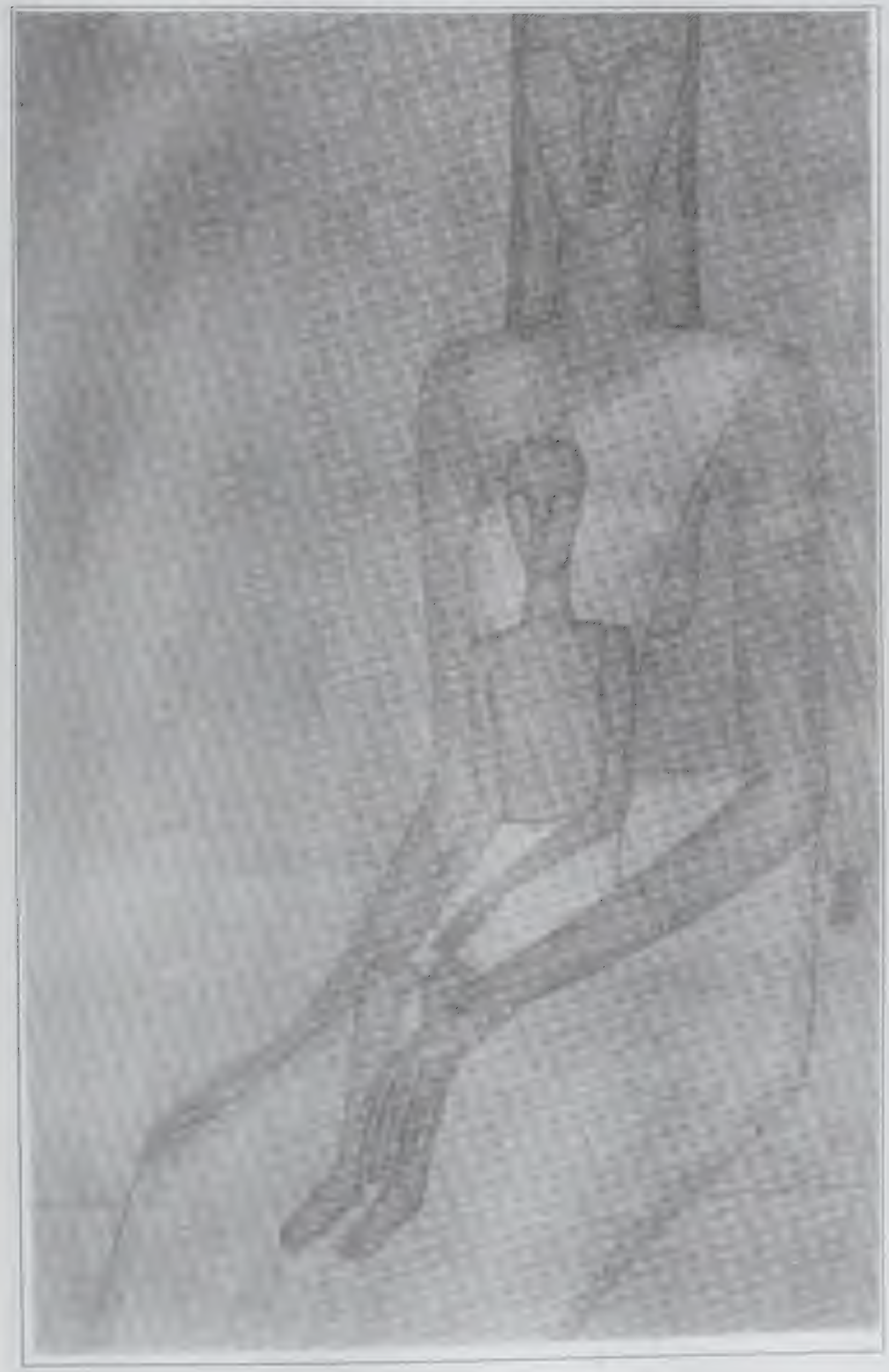


Figure 6. Prankrishna Pal

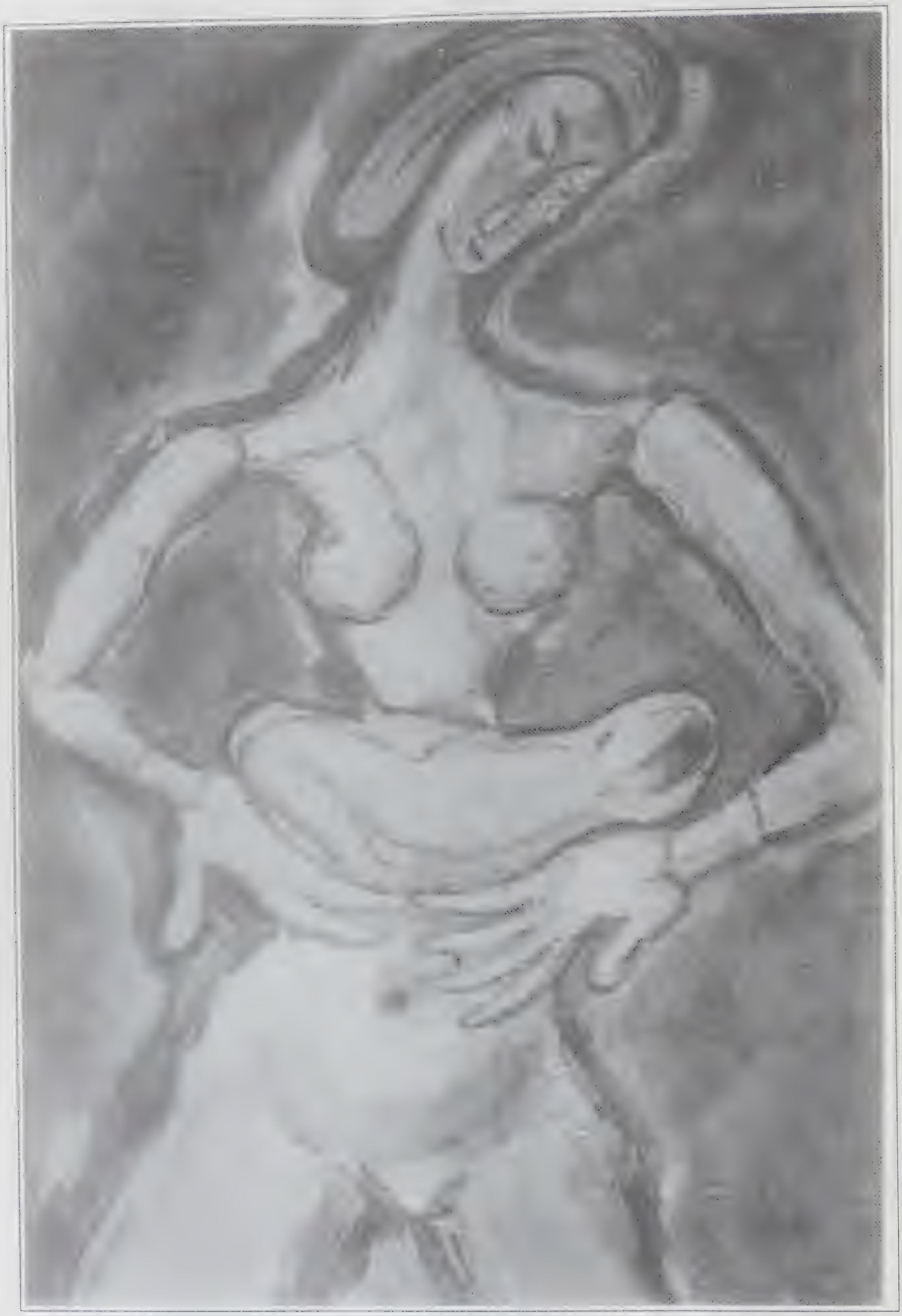


Figure 7. Sunilmadhab Sen

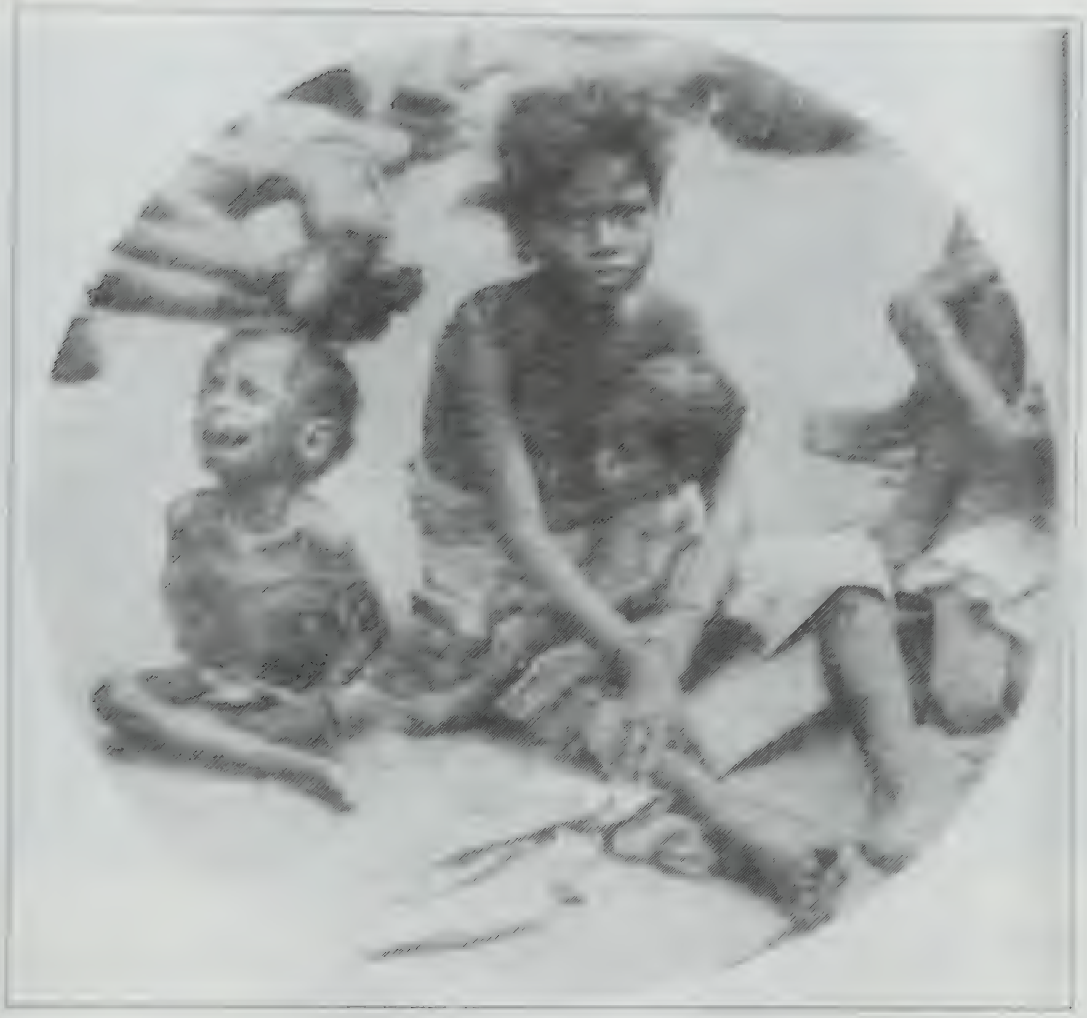


Figure 8. Perplexed and Distressed
(Courtesy The Hindustan Standard)

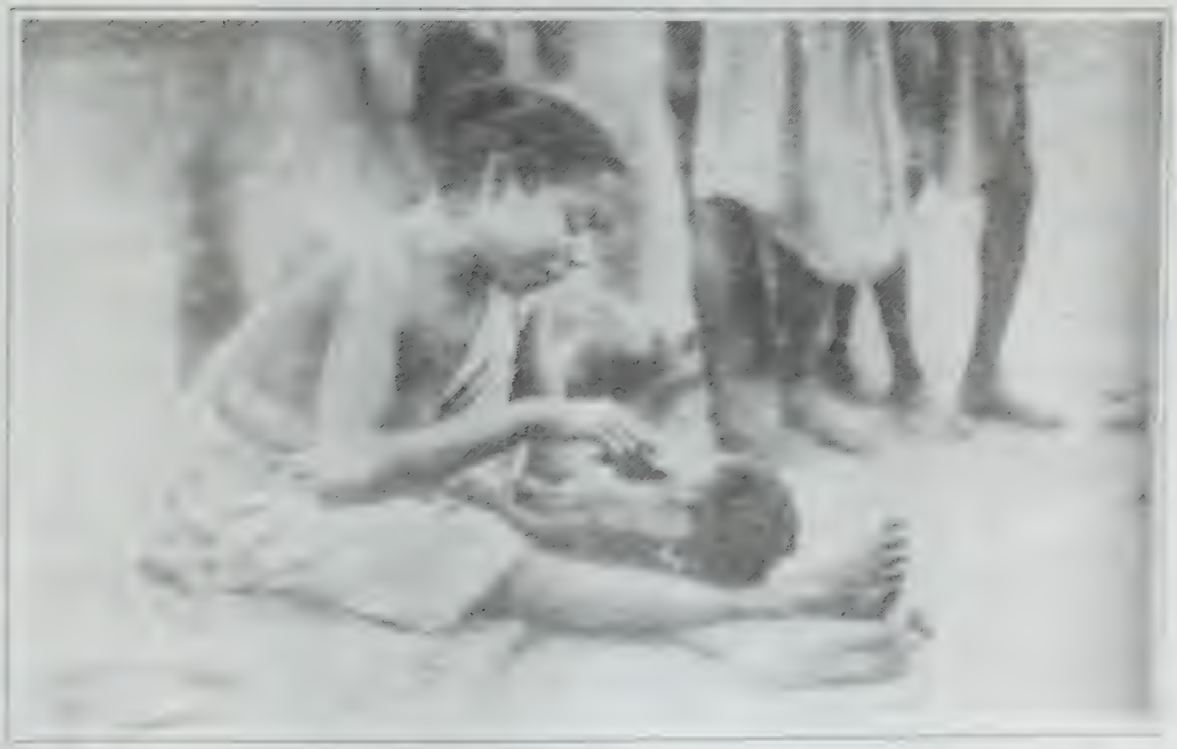


Figure 9 a. "O, Babu, Babu amur!" ("Darling! O. my Darling!"
(Courtesy The Amrita Bazar)

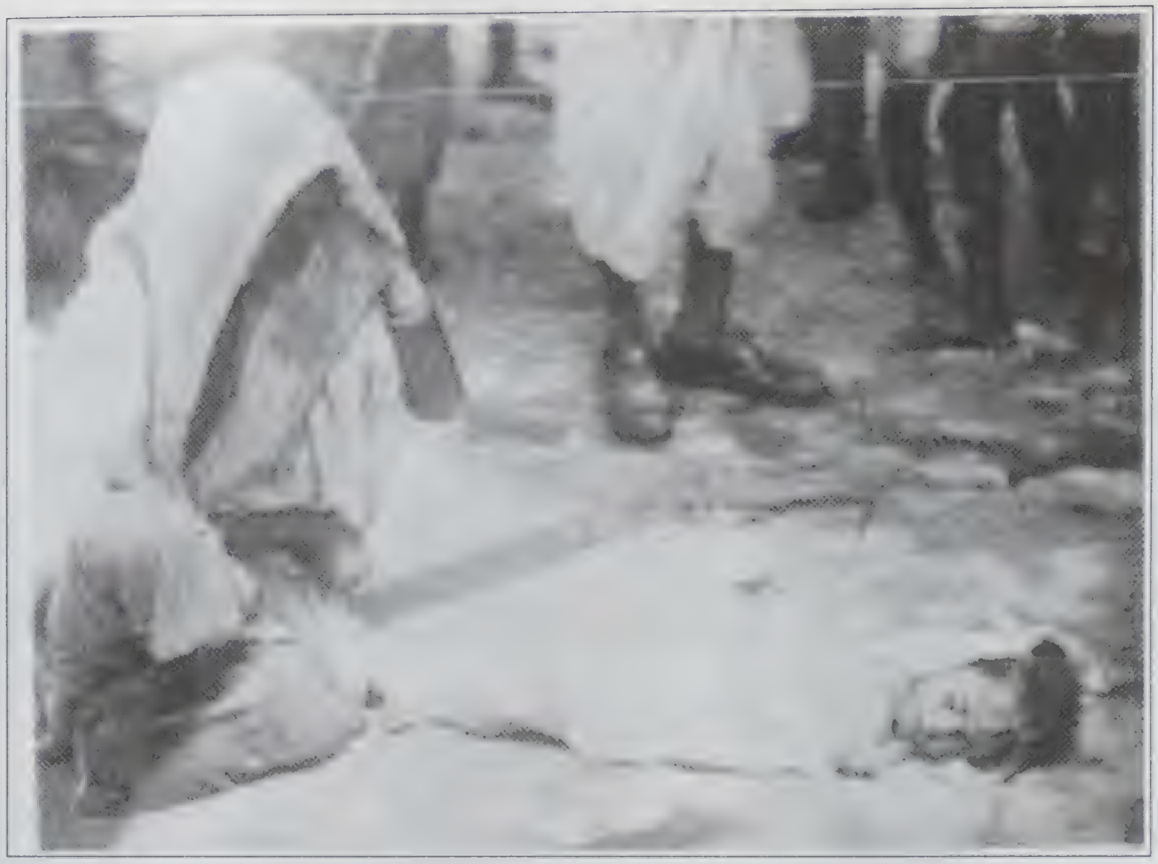


Figure 9(b). A human flower blasted by the hot breath of Famine
(Courtesy The Hindustan Standard)

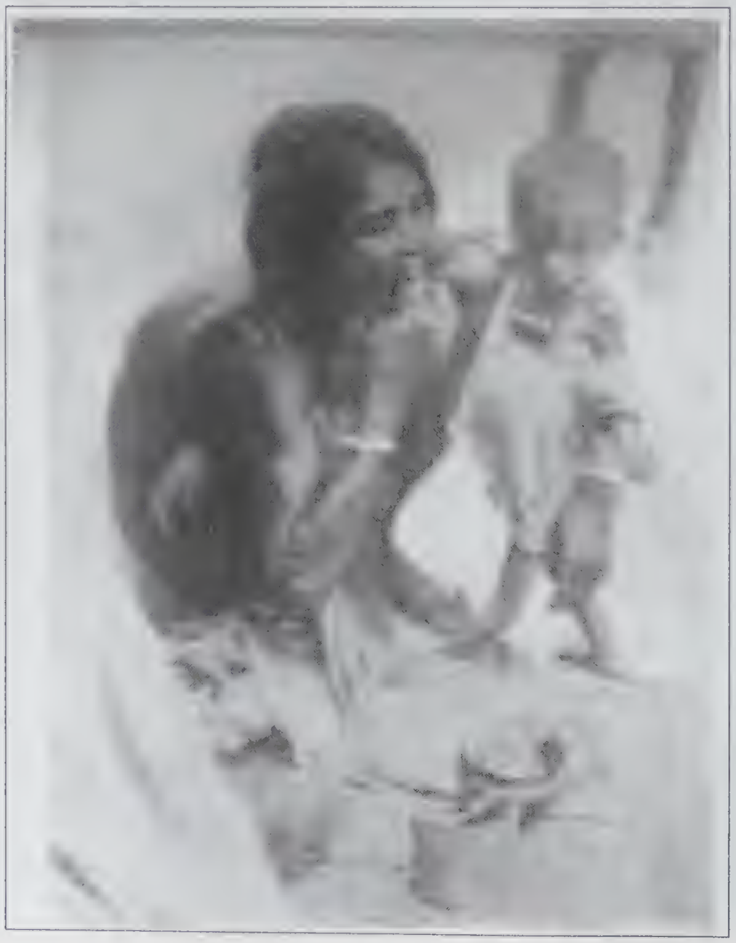


Figure 10(a). "Nothing for me, Mother dear?"
(Courtesy The Hindustan Standard)

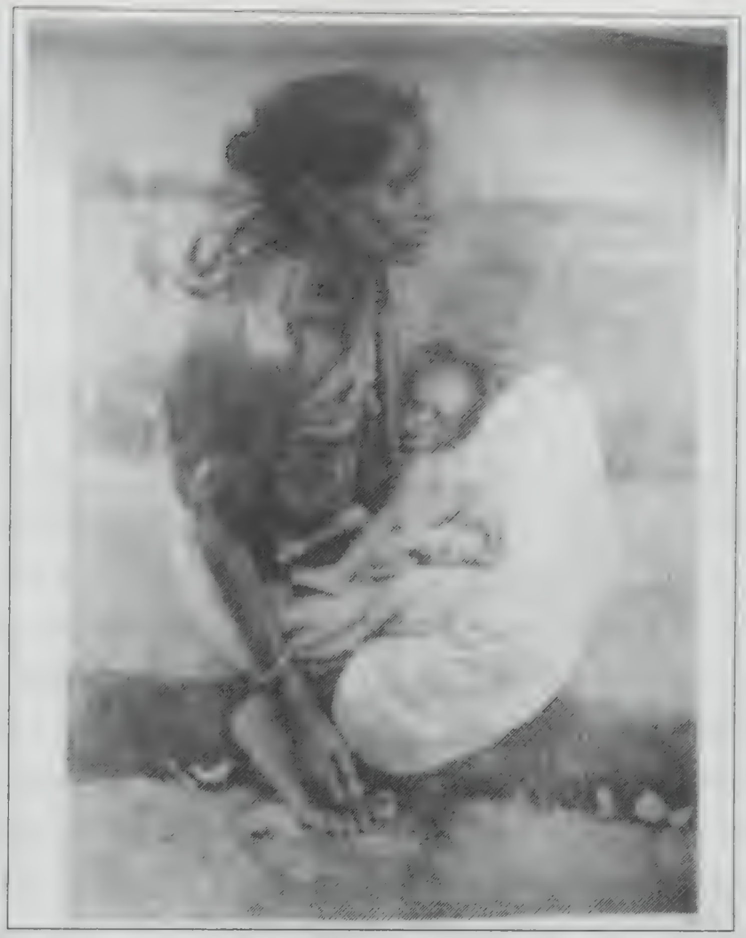


Figure 10(b). Rank despair on face and a dead child on hip she waits for what she does not know
(Courtesy The Hindustan Standard)

NOTES

1. Mahasweta Devi, 'Daini' (The Witch-Hunt), in Kalpana Bardhan (ed. and trans), *Of Women, Outcastes, Peasants, and Rebels: A Selection of Bengali Short Stories*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990, p. 243.
2. Bhabani Bhattacharya, *He Who Rides a Tiger*, New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1954, p. 53.
3. Arjun Appadurai, 'Gastro-politics in Hindu South Asia', *American Ethnologist* 8:3, August 1981, pp. 494–511, concentrates on Tamil Brahmin households. But its insights hold good nonetheless for caste Hindu Bengali households. See, for instance, Chitrita Banerji, *Life and Food in Bengal*, London: George Weidenfeld & Nicolson Ltd., 1991; rpt. New Delhi: Rupa & Co., 1993, for an account of the gendered hierarchies of cooking, eating, and serving, pp. 17–18, 33, and passim. Also see Barbara Harriss, 'The Intrafamily Distribution in Hunger in South Asia,' in Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen (eds.), *The Political Economy of Hunger*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1990, and Najma Rizvi, 'Socioeconomic and Cultural Factors Affecting Interhousehold and Intrahousehold Food Distribution in Rural and Urban Bangladesh,' in Anne Sharman, Janet Theophano, Karen Curtis, and Ellen Messner (eds.), *Diet and Domestic Life in Society*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991, pp. 91–118. Satyajit Ray's *Mahanagar* (1963) casts a keen

eye on middle-class Bengali gastropolitics. The first time that the heroine, Arati, eats her morning meal at the same time as her husband (the first time, that is, after the wedding feast) is when she is about to assume employment outside the home. In a later scene, when she has become the sole breadwinner, we see her eating first (and being served what looks like a fish head 'a favoured Bengali food' by her mother-in-law) while her husband observes her from within.

4. See, for instance, Martha Alter Chen, *Perpetual Mourning: Widowhood in Rural India*, New Delhi and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000, and (ed.), *Widows in India: Social Neglect and Public Action*, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1998; and Chitrita Banerji, 'What Bengali Widows Cannot Eat', *Granta* 52 (Winter 1995), pp. 163–71.
5. Tanika Sarkar, *Words to Win: The Making of Amar Jiban, A Modern Autobiography*, New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1999, pp. 253–57. It is worth remarking that the numerous studies of female hunger and female abstinence in medieval and modern Europe and the United States – Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987; Joan Jacobs Brumberg, *Fasting Girls: The Emergence of Anorexia Nervosa as a Modern Disease*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988; Maud Ellmann, *The Hunger Artists: Starving, Writing, and Imprisonment*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993, and Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993 – analyze situations in which women choose, in however patriarchally overdetermined a manner, to abstain from food. This is not quite identical to an alimentary thraldom much more brutally imposed upon Bengali Hindu women (often by other women). For an account of comparable gendered disparities in diet in nineteenth-century England, see John Burnett, *Plenty and Want: A Social History of Diet in English from 1815 to the Present Day*, rev. edition, 1966, London: Scolar Press, 1979.
6. Amartya Sen and Sunil Sengupta, 'Malnutrition of Rural Children and the Sex Bias', in Devaki Jain and Nirmala Banerjee (eds.), *Tyranny of the Household: Investigative Essays on Women's Work*, New Delhi: Shakti Books, 1985, p. 24. Also see, in the same volume, A.K.M. Alauddin Chowdhury, 'Maternal Nutrition in Rural Bangladesh' pp. 25–37, and Srilatha Batliwala, 'Women in Poverty: The Energy, Health and Nutrition Syndrome', pp. 38–47. Also see L.C. Chen, E. Haque, and S. D'Souza, 'Sex bias in the family allocation of food and health care in rural Bangladesh', *Population and Development Review* 1.1 (1981).
7. See Naila Kabeer, *Reversed Realities: Gender Hierarchies in Development Thought*, London and New York: Verso, 1994, pp. 175–177, for an analysis of the ways in which patriarchal familial ideologies – and some economists – disregard the costs to women of breast-feeding.
8. Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen, *Hunger and Public Action,* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989, pp. 50–54. These figures are from the late 1980s. The Hunger Project estimates that the current figure for India is 50 million.
9. Margaret Kelleher, *The Feminization of Famine: Expressions of the Inexpressible*? Durham: Duke University Press, 1997. My own work supplements hers by examining a wider range

of texts about the famine, including cinematic and Bangla-language ones; it also seeks to embed the iconography of famine within the context of normalized female hunger (often ritualized as self-sacrifice). Megan Vaughan, *The Story of an African Famine: Hunger, Gender and Politics in Malawi*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987 attempts, especially in her penultimate chapter ('Gender and Famine'), to 'locate . . . famine within a larger historical process of change in the economic role and social status of women'. p. 119.

10. There is a vast literature on subcontinental famines, especially those of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The following is a very partial list: David Arnold, *Famine: Social Crisis and Historical Change,* Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988 and 'Famine in Peasant Consciousness and Peasant Action: Madras, 1876-78', in *Subaltern Studies III*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984; B.M. Bhatia, *Famines in India: A Study in Some Aspects of the Economic History of India 1860-1965,* Delhi: Asia Publishing House, 1963, 1967; Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Nino Famines and the Making of the Third World,* London and New York: Verso, 2001; Romesh Chunder Dutt, *Indian Famines: Their Causes and Prevention*, London: P.S. King & Son, 1901, and *Famines and Land Assessments in India,* rpt. New Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation, 1985; Kali Charan Ghosh, *Famines in Bengal, 1770-1943,* Calcutta: Indian Associated Publishing Co., 1944; Paul Greenough, *Prosperity and Misery in Modern Bengal: The Famine of 1943-1944*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982; Arup Maharatna, *The Demography of Famines: An Indian Historical Perspective,* Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996; Michelle McAlpin, *Subject to Famine: Food Crises and Economic Change in Western India, 1860–1920*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983; Aditee Nag Chowdhury Zilly, *The Vagrant Peasant: Agrarian Distress and Desertion in Bengal 1770 to 1830*, Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1982; Amartya Sen, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation,* New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980; Sanjay Sharma, *Famine, Philanthropy and the Colonial State: North India in the Early Nineteenth Century*, Delhi and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001; Navtej Singh, *Starvation and Colonialism: A Study of Famines in the Nineteenth-Century British Punjab, 1858–1901,* New Delhi: National Book Organisation, 1996; and Hari Shanker Srivastava, *The History of Indian Famines and Development of Famine Policy, 1858–1918,* Agra: Sri Ram Mehra & Co., 1968.
11. See for details, W.W. Hunter, *Annals of Rural Bengal*, London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1897.
12. Romesh Chunder Dutt, *Famines and Land Assessments in India*, London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1900; rpt. New Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation, 1985 and *The Economic History of India*, 2 vols. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1906 [second edition]; rpt. New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1960; Dadabhai Naoroji, *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India*, London: S. Sonnenchein, 1901.
13. Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts*, p. 57.
14. *The Statesman*, Calcutta, 14 September 1943; rpt. in Ian Stephens, *Monsoon Morning*, London: Ernest Benn, 1966, p. 188. See Nancy Scheper-Hughes, *Death Without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazi*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992 for a scathing analysis of the ways in which the modern Brazilian state colludes with the

biomedical health care system to recode chronic hunger as a 'psychological' problem requiring medication rather than food: '*Nervos*, a rich folk conceptual scheme for describing relations among body, mind, and social body, is appropriated by medicine and transformed into something other: a biomedical disease that alienates mind from body and that conceals the social relations of sickness'. p. 169.

15. Mahasweta Devi, 'Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay, and Pirtha' in Gayatri Spivak (trans.), *Imaginary Maps*, New York and London: Routledge, 1995.
16. The following is a rough chronology of the famine: At the beginning of the 1940s, the colonial government in New Delhi decided to prioritize Britain's war aims. The Congress Party, in protest against the subordination of Indian interests, withdrew from the running of the elected provincial governments and therefore from cooperation with British rule. The Muslim League ministry in Bengal, however, did not resign; but it remained distinctly subordinate to the British governor of the province, as well as to British military authorities and civil servants. The threat of war in the meanwhile became more immediate with the fall of Hongkong, Singapore, and Burma in 1942. Refugees arrived by the tens of thousands from Burma, and imports of Burmese rice came to an end as well. The fears prompted by the fall of Rangoon led to the institution of the 'boat denial' scheme. 1942 was a turbulent year for other reasons as well. The Quit India movement, launched by the Congress Party and widely acted upon, led to repressions on a staggering scale. In October, Midnapur, where political agitation and political repression were particularly intense, was ravaged by a cyclone, as was the 24 Parganas district. This had deleterious effects on the rice crop, effects that were made much worse by the inauguration of a 'rice denial' scheme. Throughout, military, official, and urban priorities were privileged over local needs, including those of bare subsistence. The 'rice-denial' scheme played havoc with the grain marketing system, prompting hoarding and speculation on an unprecedented scale. The price of rice soared by the end of the year and, in a few months, there were widespread cases of death by starvation in Midnapore, Chittagong, 24 Parganas, Noakhali, Tippera, Faridpur, Dacca, Murshidabad, Burdwan, and Rangpur districts. Rural refugees began to pour into the cities, especially Calcutta, in the hundreds of thousands. The clumsy, erratic, and inefficient interventions of the beleaguered provincial government, combined with the indifference of Delhi and of Whitehall, meant that very little famine relief reached the affected rural areas; every effort, however, was undertaken to keep the industrial and office workers of Calcutta (an industrial hub and central to the success of the war economy) provisioned. The refugees were fed in 'gruel kitchens' run in Calcutta by private charities and by the Revenue Department. But this was far from sufficient to feed the large numbers of starving people in the city, many of whom succumbed. The 1943-44 *aman* (winter) harvest of rice was unprecedentedly large; this lured some refugees back to their rural homes, as did the forced repatriation schemes of the government. But the period of recovery was prolonged and uncertain, as the rural population contended with epidemics of smallpox, cholera, and malaria. Greenough and Sen suggest that the end-point of the famine should properly be seen as mid-1946, rather than 1944.

17. Statement by Vijaylakshmi Pandit, Midnapore, October 26, 1943; rpt. in Kali Charan Ghosh, *Famines in Bengal, 1770–1943*, p. 179.
18. Arjun Appadurai, 'How Moral is South Asia's Economy? A Review Article', *Journal of Asian Studies* XLIII, no. 3 (May 1984), p. 485.
19. Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom.*
20. *Famine Inquiry Commission Report on Bengal* (1944), pp. 108–146.
21. W.R. Aykroyd, *Conquest of Famine*, New York: Reader's Digest Press, 1975, p. 77.
22. Amartya Sen, *Poverty and Famines*, especially 'Appendix D, Famine Mortality: A Case Study', pp. 217–249. Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal suggest that between 3.5 and 3.8 million people were killed as a result of the famine; see *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997; London and New York: Routledge, 1998, p. 157. Also see Sugata Bose, 'Starvation amidst Plenty: The Making of Famine in Bengal, Honan, and Tonkin, 1942-45', *Modern Asian Studies,* 1990.
23. David Arnold, 'Famine in Peasant Consciousness and Peasant Action: Madras', p. 73.
24. David Arnold, *Famine: Social Crisis and Historical Change*, p. 86.
25. Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 168. For a mordant analysis of the profitability of famine and their sometimes deliberate causation or prolongation, see Amrita Rangasami, 'Failure of Exchange Entitlements' Theory of Famine: A Response', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. XX, nos. 41 and 42, October 1985, and David Keen, *The Benefits of Famine: A Political Economy of Famine and Relief in Southwestern Sudan, 1983–1989*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994.
26. Sanjay Sharma, *Famine, Philanthropy, and the Colonial State*, p. 114.
27. Megan Vaughan, *The Story of an African Famine*, p. 34.
28. Bina Agarwal, *A Field of One's Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 70.
29. Sanjay Sharma, *Famine, Philanthropy, and the Colonial State*, p. 115, notes that the steep rise in juvenile kidnapping during the 1837-8 famine in northern India involved girls in the vast majority of cases. Few boys were kidnapped; usually a ransom was demanded for their return.
30. Paul R. Greenough, *Prosperity and Misery in Modern Bengal*, pp. 270–71.
31. Nikhil Sarkar, *A Matter of Conscience: Artists Bear Witness to the Great Bengal Famine of 1943*, trans. Satyabrata Dutta, Calcutta: Punascha, 1998, p. 22.
32. Most of the figures in this concatenation are, as it happens, male. This is a fact of some note, though it must be conceded that the work of someone like Ela Sen does not differ appreciably from those of her male counterparts, except insofar as she focuses exclusively – as the others do not – on the female experience of famine.
33. Paul R. Greenough, *Prosperity and Misery in Modern Bengal*, p. 184.
34. Tarakchandra Das, *Bengal Famine (1943) as Revealed in a Survey of the Destitutes in Calcutta,* Calcutta: Calcutta University Press, 1949.
35. Ibid, p. 94.
36. Ibid, p. 93. These disparities were repeated in the *Famine Inquiry Commission Report on Bengal*, which relied significantly upon the survey produced by Das.
37. Kali Charan Ghosh, *Famines in Bengal 1770–1943*, p. 183.

38. Amartya Sen, *Poverty and Famines*, p. 211.
39. Paul R. Greenough, *Prosperity and Misery in Modern Bengal,* pp. 3–11.
40. Nikhil Sarkar, *A Matter of Conscience*, pp. 20–21.
41. T.K. Dutt, *Hungry Bengal*, Lahore: Indian Printing Works, 1944, pp. 46–7.
42. Kali Charan Ghosh, *Famines in Bengal 1770–1943*, p. 74.
43. Ibid, p. 74.
44. Ibid, p. 75.
45. Ibid, p. 75.
46. Ibid.
47. Ibid, p. 183.
48. Nikhil Sarkar suggests that the crows function as a representation of the black marketeers, for whom the famine was a highly profitable development. See *A Matter of Conscience*, pp. 26–7.
49. See Ibid, for a detailed art historical account of the response of Bengali artists to 1350/1943.
50. Bijon Bhattacharya, *Nabanno (New Rice),* 1944, Calcutta: Prama, 1984, pp. 75–76. All translations are my own.
51. Ibid., p. 77.
52. Himani Bannerji has noted Bhattacharya's indebtedness to King Lear in the conception of the patriarch Prodhan in *The Mirror of Class: Essays on Bengali Theatre*, Calcutta: Papyrus, 1998, pp. 51–2.
53. On the IPTA, see Rustom Bharucha, *Rehearsals of Revolution: The Political Theater of Bengal,* Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1983 and Himani Bannerji, *The Mirror of Class.*
54. Kironmoy Raha, *Bengali Theatre*, 1978, New Delhi: National Book Trust, India, 2001, p. 155. The impact of *Nabanna* was felt beyond the theatre and manifested itself in films like Khwaja Ahmad Abbas, '*Dharti ke Lal*' (1946), which was produced by the IPTA and based in part on the 1944 production by Shombhu Mitra and Bijon Bhattacharya. See Ashish Rajadhyaksha and Paul Willemen, eds. *Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema,* London: British Film Institute and New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 285.
55. Himani Bannerji, *The Mirror of Class*, p. 50.
56. Rustom Bharucha, *Rehearsals of Revolution*, pp. 49–50.
57. Kumkum Sangari, *Politics of the Possible: Essays on Gender, History, Narratives, Colonial English,* New Delhi: Tulika, 1999, p. 385.
58. Ibid, p. 36.
59. Cited in Shantinath K. Desai, *Bhabani Bhattacharya*, Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1995, p. 7.
60. There is no dearth of villainous male characters in the novel, Samarendra Basu (Rahoul's father) and his business associate, the ironically named Sir Abalabandhu, being only the most prominent among them. But the more commonplace experience of betrayal and abandonment by male family members and protectors is nowhere to be found in this novel.
61. Monju's transformation occupies a very subordinate subset of Rahoul's story; unlike him, she has little choice but to accede to the choices her husband has made. Kelleher also notes the difference between the passive experience of hunger of a figure like

Kajoli and the consciously chosen and politically motivated hunger strike of Devata. *Feminization of Famine*, pp. 203–4.

62. *Asani Sanket* (*Distant Thunder*), dir. Satyajit Ray (1973). Andrew Robinson speaks of Chutki's seducer/lover as an urban male. See his *Satyajit Ray: The Inner Eye*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989, p. 226. While the film itself is silent about his origins, he is shown to be clad in a synthetically coloured 'ready-made' shirt; this is a mark of his difference from the rural males, even the relatively prosperous ones like Biswasbabu. And, though he is not a cultivator himself, he has access to large quantities in rice. This may mark him as an urban speculator in rice (a common figure in representations of the famine).
63. Robinson has also taken note of this in *Satyajit Ray: The Inner Eye*, p. 224.
64. Bhaskar Sarkar, 'The Inward Look: The Politics and Practice of Cinematic Representaion', in Sumita Chakravarty (ed.), *The Enemy Within: The Films of Mrinal Sen*, Trowbridge, Wiltshire, UK: Flicks Books, 2000, p. 99.
65. Mrinal Sen, dir. *Akaler Sandhaney* (1980); Mrinal Sen, *Akaler Sandhaney (In Search of Famine)*, script reconstructed & trans. by Samik Bandyopadhyay, Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1983.
66. Margaret Kelleher, *The Feminization of Famine*, p. 6.
67. Samik Bandyopadhyay, Introduction to *Akaler Sandhaney (In Search of Famine)*, p. vi.
68. I borrow this term from Thomas Keenan's admirable book, *Fables of Responsibility: Aberrations and Predicaments in Ethics and Politics*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997, which details the necessity of an ethics that is not governed by certainties, full knowledge, or the operations of rule. On responsibility, see Jacques Derrida, 'Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority', trans. Mary Quaintance, in Drucilla Cornell, Michel Rosenfeld, and David Gray Carlson (eds), *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, New York and London: Routledge, 1992.

SECTION FIVE

CREATIVITY/VOICES

CHAPTER 17

A Voice of Protest: The Writings of Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain (1880–1932)

Bharati Ray

Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain was arguably the earliest and most original woman critique of patriarchy in colonial Bengal. Brought up in the strictest seclusion and denied formal education, she emerged as one of the most prominent litterateurs of her time. In 1905 she showed her husband the draft of the only piece she published in English, *Sultana's Dream,*[1] which has attracted some attention from scholars at the international level. Her other works written in Bengali are, however, much more eloquent in terms of both language and content in her rebellion against a system that kept women unfairly subjugated to men. Rokeya's was a daring and ruthless criticism of the ruling anti-women customs in contemporary Bengali Muslim society. The Hindu women of the time were not any better off than their Muslim sisters. Kailasbasini Devi (b. 1837) in *Hindumahilaganer Hinabashtha* (The Degraded Condition of Hindu Women), published in 1863, gave a graphic description of the low status of Hindu women. Nineteenth century historical and literary works bear testimony to the unenviable position of women of the Hindu community. The autobiography of Rasasundari Devi (b. 1809), *Amar Jiban* (My Life, Calcutta, 1868) is a convincing enough mirror. However, Rokeya's main concern was the women of her community, and so in this article the focus is limited to that community. Needless to say that most of her main arguments were valid and applicable to the patriarchal structure of other contemporary Indian communities as well.

This paper explores the social, political and cultural compulsions that shaped Rokeya's ideology and work. In the process, it sheds light on Muslim society of the time, the changes it underwent in the course of the colonial encounter, and the emergence of a new generation of urban middle and upper middle class women in Bengal. Based on Rokeya's literary oeuvre, it focuses on her notion of *unnati* (progress), on her perception of the forces responsible for women's *abanati* (degradation), and on her views regarding the much discussed "duties of women".

THE CONTEXT

Late nineteenth century Bengal is seen as a site of both social reform and of resistance to reform. Quite expectedly, these processes did not manifest in Muslim and Hindu societies in an identical manner, nor within the same time frame. While reform movements among the Hindus took a head start by the early nineteenth century,[2] Muslim society remained relatively unaffected. The Muslim response to the onslaught of the West was of a more overtly religious nature, initiating social movements that highlighted the glories of an original and pristine Islamic heritage.[3] Some scholars speculate that a possible reason for this could have been their deep-seated resentment as erstwhile rulers who had been forced out of power by the British.[4] Another reason was possibly the late emergence of the Muslim middle class. The earlier middle class in Bengal was Hindu-dominated; the Hindus were ahead in terms of urbanization, in trade and commerce, and professional services under the British. As Wakil Ahmed avers,

> The Hindus and the Muslims took two different routes when the British rule was established. The Hindus took full advantage of the opportunities offered by the British Government. Opting early for English education, the Hindus prospered with access to government and other employment. On the other hand, the Muslims were indifferent to the British rule and turned their face against English education. Inability to secure gainful employment coupled with reluctance to engage in trade and commerce led to the decline in the circumstances of the Muslim community. The unequal development of the Hindu and the Muslim communities, especially of their middle classes, was a great tragedy in the social history of Bengal.[5]

Anisuzzaman mentions that it was only around the 1870s that the Bengali Muslims became aware of the need for 'modernization'.[6] The Revolt of 1857 had been suppressed, the Wahabi movement had ended in 1872. 'There was no alternative for the Muslims but to co-operate with the British'.[7] The leadership, therefore, began to think along new lines. The leaders of the new movement were Sir Syed Ahmed Khan (1817–1898) in North India and Nawab Abdul Latif (1828–93) in Bengal. Sir Syed was the first to start a reform movement the keynote of which was to promote exposure to western ideas and entry to the administrative infrastructure through active co-operation with the British. He founded the Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh to spearhead the spread of his ideas.[8] In Bengal, Nawab Abdul Latif, like Sir Syed, tried to introduce the Muslims to the world of western science and to forge a friendship with the British. In 1866, he established the Muhammedan Literary Society in Calcutta with a view to spreading western ideas among the Muslim youth.[9] Another leader in Bengal, Syed Amir Ali (1849–1928), established the National Muhammedan Association in 1877.[10]

By the late nineteenth century, English education was accepted as the need of the hour. A professional and bureaucratic Muslim middle class had gradually evolved and their urge for English education was all the more pronounced perhaps because of their late entry relative to Hindus. Madrassahs were established in Dhaka, Chittagong and Rajshahi where English was taught. While in 1871 only 14.7 per cent of the Muslim population went to school, a decade later, in 1881 the percentage rose to 23.8.[11]

The new generation of western-educated Muslim men turned their thoughts to social reform. There followed a two-pronged development. On the one hand, attention was directed to the evils in the existing social system, and on the other, a movement was started for the revival of the Islamic heritage in its pristine form. New literature articulated an inspired redefinition of Islamic history, Islamic culture and social policy. A spate of journals and newspapers proliferated, such as *Ahmadi* (1886), *Sudhakar* (1889), *Kohinoor* (1898), *Nabanoor* (1903), *Muhammadi* (1903), *Saogat* (1918), *Islam Pracharak* (1891), *Dhumketu* (1922), *Basana* (1908), Sadhana (1919) *Sikha* (1927) and *Bulbul* (1935).[12] Like the Brahmo reformers of Hindu vintage, the Muslim intellectuals of this generation also turned to the 'glory days' of the past, when Islam had flourished in its pristine purity. The quest for an authentic Muslim identity was one component of the new consciousness among Muslims.[13] Amir Ali took the lead in this task, and was joined by a galaxy of brilliant men, such as, Mir Musharraf Hossain (1847–1911), Abdul Hamid Khan Yusufzahi (1845–1910?), Syed Shamsul Huda (1862–1922), Abdur Rahim (1867–1952), Abdul Karim (1863–1943) Nausher Ali Khan Yusufzai (1864–1924), Mirza Sujat Ali and Nawab Ali Chowdhury (1863–1929). They wrote profusely, conducted research, sponsored publications of authoritative books and new textbooks to enunciate Islamic heritage and culture. It is important to note that in this historical exercise, the first two leaders, Abdul Latif and Amir Ali, were not concerned with a Bengali identity[14] but the new generation of educated men was. This sowed the seeds of Bengali Muslim nationalism. Two themes dominated the pages of contemporary journals and newspapers – the issue of language, and the issue of Islam. The Muslims in Bengal were not only becoming aware of their Muslim identity, they were also defining themselves as a Bengali-speaking people. 'The mother tongue of Bengali Muslims is Bengali. This is as clear as daylight', wrote *Kohinoor. The Masik Mohammadi (1927), Al-Islam (1915), Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Patrika (1918), Sudhakar, Saogat* and *Sikha*, also wrote in a similar vein.[15]

The Muslim reformers like their Hindu-Brahmo counterparts, too worried about the 'women's question'.[16] In the articles that poured forth on different aspects of current degeneration of Islam, attention was almost inevitably focused on the particularly "degraded" condition of women. The customs of child marriage, polygamy and *talak* came in for severe criticism. Reform was urgently called for, and the first to be tackled was the area of education.

While men were being educated and turning to writing as well as to other professions, most elite women were expected to uphold the hoary tradition of purdah. This was in fact the clearest indicator of social status. In aristocratic families, women received some elementary education at home – in contrast to most Hindu women before the inception of social reforms – but the nature of this education was primarily religious (how to recite the Koran) and household-oriented (how to keep accounts of family expenses).[17] Reading and writing of Bengali were discouraged, because Urdu was the language of the Muslim elites in North India.[18] Under the circumstances, two questions plagued the reformers: first, whether women were to be educated at all and, second, if so, what direction was this education to take? Would women be educated at home or in school? These were, of course, exactly the same questions that had dominated the debates on education of Hindu women. On the first question there was some (although not absolute) consensus. Muslim reformers, like their Brahmo-Hindu counterparts, felt that education would make women better companions to their husbands, better mothers to their children and better homemakers.[19] But there was an added dimension as well. Muslims were consciously searching for a distinct identity, and they believed that women, when educated, would become better Muslims, learn to appreciate the message of Islam and, consequently, be better equipped to bring up their chidren in the true spirit of Islam. To quote a contemporary exposition:

> Continuing corrupt indoctrination has poisoned our society to its foundation. Women, as mothers, can be the source of both progress as well as of harm to society. Attitudes and dispositions of mothers leave indelible imprint on the minds of innocent children. Children are born with the infirmities of their mothers, mothers who are illiterate, who suffer from ignorance, and who are steeped in superstitions. Until and unless we are able to invest our women with appropriate education, there will be little hope of any betterment in our circumstances.[20]

It was with regard to the second issue, the extent and the place of education, that opinions differed. To send girls out of the home to formal schools was not accepted by many who in principle agreed on the need for their education. It was purdah versus progress. A powerful section of the community preferred *zenana* education or education at home.[21] Neither Abdul Latif, nor Amir Ali did anything concrete for women's formal education. Of the first generation of educated Muslim women many were tutored at home, some were to a great extent self-taught, and just a few attended formal educational institutions at the lowest level.

Many of the women who did receive some early education, took an active part in the process of educating other women. In 1897, the Calcutta Girls' Madrassah was set up with the patronage of Murshidabad's Firdaus Mahal, who donated a large amount of money for the purpose. The credit for being the real pioneer of formal education for girls in Bengal goes to Nawab Faizunnessa Chaudhurani (1834–1903) of Comilla, who was granted the title of Nawab despite being a woman. She founded in Comilla a free Madrassah for girls, which later became the reputed Faizunnessa Degree College. She also set up primary schools at each of the administrative centres in her estate, and went on to establish an English medium school for girls in 1873. Meanwhile in Dhaka, the Eden School for girls, modelled on the Bethune School of Calcutta (established in 1849), was founded around 1878.[22] *Bamabodhini Patrika,* a reputed journal for women (first published in 1863) reported in *Baishakh* 1296 *BS* (1879) that there were 87 students in the school, though none had yet passed the Entrance examination. In 1880 out of 153 students at Eden only one was a Muslim. According to the Report on Female Education in Bengal, 1881–82, out of 184 students in the High English School, there was not a single Muslim woman, and in the Middle English School level out of 340 students, only four were Muslim.

ROKEYA

It was at this time, into a world of change and resistance to change, that Rokeya was born. The story of her life helps us understand how she came to write as she did.

Family

Rokeya's father, Zahiruddin Muhammad Abu Ali Saber (?–1913), was the landlord of Pairaband, a village in the district of Rangpur in northern Bengal – now in Bangladesh –

and belonged to the upper caste Muslim Saber family. He had inherited a huge amount of property from his ancestors, but lost it because of his self-indulgence and profligacy, spending his last days in poverty. He had four wives, one of them a European. One of the wives was childless, the other three had between them nine sons and six daughters. Zahiruddin was a learned gentleman, at home in Arabic, Persian and Urdu as well as English, but was, apparently, as superstitious as he was orthodox.[23]

Rokeya's mother, Rahatunnessa Sabera Chaudhurani, was the first wife of Zahiruddin Mahmud. She came from a distinguished family and was the daughter of Hossainuddin Chaudhury, a landlord in Dhaka. Unfortunately nothing much is known about her. She had two sons and three daughters. The eldest of Rahatunnessa's children, Abul Asad Ibrahim Saber was, unlike his father, a 'progressive' man. He studied at St. Xavier's College in Calcutta and supported the pro-Western policy of Sir Syed Ahmed. Believing that Muslim women needed to be educated, Ibrahim taught both his sisters to read and write. He joined the civil service under the British and became a Deputy Magistrate. Therefore, from the class of traditional zamindars, he joined the ranks of professionals and bureaucrats, the group that formed the backbone of the new middle class, both among the Hindus and the Muslims. Rokeya's elder sister, Karimunnessa (1855–1926), was according to custom taught the Koran Sharif by rote. But she picked up some Persian and Bengali by listening to her brothers doing their lessons. She learnt to write Bengali by scratching on the ground in the backyard of their house. When this offence of reading and writing was discovered, she was quickly married off at the age of fourteen in 1889 to Abdul Hafiz Gazhnavi. Karimunnessa continued her studies at home after marriage, became proficient in Bengali and learned Arabic, Persian and some English as well. It was, however, Bengali that she preferred over all other languages. Rokeya, who was very close to her, said that Karimunnessa composed many poems on domestic issues. Unfortunately none saw the light of day.[24] Rokeya's younger sister, Homyera (?–1962), was married to the reputed writer and social worker, Amir Hossain Chaudhury, and herself dedicated much of her time to social work.

Rokeya's family had a sprawling house. Says Rokeya,

> We were well-to-do. We used to eat well and dress well, decked up with jewellery. Our house, surrounded by deep woods, had few equals. In the midst of three and a half bighas of land stood only our huge house.[25]

But it was not for the women of the household to enjoy the home and its surroundings. Zahiruddin Saber imposed on the women of the family strict *abarodh* (literally, confinement), which he believed was in tune with their status. Rokeya recalls,

> From the age of five, I had to observe purdah even before ladies who were not family members.... If suddenly some ladies from the neighbourhood came calling, someone at home would give me a warning and I would run helter-skelter as if I was in mortal fear of my life. I would go and hide myself...sometime in the kitchen behind a large wicker basket...sometime inside a grass mat kept rolled up by a maidservant...some other time under a bed.[26]

Rokeya recounts the stories of her childhood with great bitterness. She tells us,

> Once while we were in residence in Calcutta and I was about five years of age, two maidservants came to visit my sister-in-law, wife of my second brother (step-brother) from her home in Bihar. Those two maidservants appeared to have unrestricted freedom to move at will anywhere and everywhere in our house. Poor me, I had to run away like a scared young fawn to hide myself from them – be it behind a door or under a table. There was an attic, hardly used, on the second floor of the house, and very early each morning I was taken there by my ayah, where I passed the whole day, often unfed and hungry. The maidservants from Bihar, after thoroughly exploring the whole house, tumbled on to the existence of the attic. Halu, a nephew and almost of the same age as mine, rushed to tell me of this dreadful discovery. Fortunately there was a bed in that room, and I quickly slipped under it, scared even to breathe in case those heartless women suspiciously looked under the bed! There were a few empty steel trunks, wickerwork chairs and the like, which poor Halu, with all the strength of a six-year-old, tried to arrange around me. Hardly anyone bothered to ask if I had any food or drink. Occasionally when Halu chanced upon me there during his games, I would ask him to get me some food and drink. He would sometimes fetch me a glass of water, maybe some puffed rice, but very often he would forget. After all, he was just a child. I had to spend four days in that attic in such distressing conditions.[27]

Rokeya, obviously, could not go to school. Her father was ambitious for his two sons and wanted them to learn Arabic, Persian, Urdu and English in order to get on in life. For his daughters, his plans were radically different. No question of careers for them; they were to be brought up as ideal, idle women, befitting products of a leisured upper class. At home, as mentioned earlier, Karimunnessa learned by eavesdropping on her brothers. Rokeya, on the other hand, was given lessons in secret by her brother, Ibrahim Saber, to whom in grateful remembrance she dedicated her novel, *Padmarag*

> Ever since my childhood, I have been overwhelmed by your love and affection for me. It is you who moulded me single-handedly. I have little or no idea how good a teacher one's parents or one's spiritual instructor can be, but for me, I know that you have been my only instructor.[28]

Other relatives who came to know about the sibling educational enterprise, taunted them, and tried their best to obstruct them, but they remained undaunted. Shamsunnahar Mahmud, Rokeya's biographer, writes,

> Their father was utterly opposed to her learning Bengali or English. There was hardly any opportunity for her to study during the day, so the brother and the sister would wait eagerly for nightfall. After dinner, when their father had gone to bed, the two of them would sit down with their books. In the depth of night, with the world plunged into darkness, a faint light would flicker in their room. The two of them would commence their lessons in the silence of the night. The

> brother was the teacher, and his sister his earnest pupil, drinking deep at the fountain of knowledge.[29]

Rokeya learned some English from her brother, but concentrated mostly on Bengali with the help of Karimunnessa Dedicating the second volume of her book *Motichoor* to Karimunnessa, Rokeya writes,

> When I was very young, it was only because of your caring concern that I was introduced to *Varnaparichay* (a Bengali primer) so that I could learn to read and write the Bengali language. A large number of our relations were opposed to my learning Bengali, though they were not against Urdu or Persian. You were the only one who lent consistent support to my efforts to learn.[30]

Of course, the relative most opposed to Rokeya's learning Bengali was her own father. His disapproval of the language was in keeping with the prevailing ethos of upper class Muslim families all over India. Urdu was the *lingua franca* of the *sharif* Muslims, and in Muslim-dominated schools, the medium of instruction was mostly Urdu. Although in Bengal, the majority of the Muslim population spoke Bengali, this was considered to be the commoner's language, completely inappropriate for the cultured Muslim society, to which the high-born Saber family belonged.

Marriage

Rokeya was married off early, in 1896, when she was only 16. Her husband, Syed Sakhawat Hossain (1858–1909), was a civil servant from Bihar, and a widower with one daughter from his previous marriage. Ibrahim Saber, who knew Syed, arranged the match. Sakhawat Hossain, a native of Bhagalpur in Bihar, was an educated man and a liberal in his views. He had gone to England with a government scholarship to study agriculture and joined the civil service upon his return. Sakhawat gave full support to Rokeya in her pursuit of learning as well as in her literary pursuits. Ghulam Murshid, in a recent book, says that Sakhawat had picked up his ideas on women's liberation from the West, and that he had passed them on to his wife.[31] But Rokeya's indebtedness to her husband should not be exaggerated. Rokeya did speak of him with due respect; and she ensured that the school that she founded with his money was named after him – Sakhawat Memorial Girls' School. However, she dedicated her two major works, *Motichoor* and *Padmarag,* to her sister and brother, clearly indicating where she thought her real debts lay. She dedicated *Abarodhbasini* to her mother, and seldom mentioned Sakhawat Hossain in her writings. Perhaps author Shamsul Alam is nearer the mark when he speculates that Rokeya avoided the subject deliberately, and that her silence was a 'significant' indication of 'her indifference'.[32]

Writings

Rokeya's first publication, an article entitled *'Pipasha'* (Thirst) appeared in 1902 in the journal *Nabaprabha* (first published 1901), edited by Gyanendralal Ray. She was then 22 years old.

Next appeared one of the most radical articles, '*Alankar na* Badge of Slavery?' (Jewellery, or Badges of Slavery?) in *Mahila*, edited by Girish Chandra Sen, in 1903. This was followed by several articles in *Nabanoor*, *Masik Mohammadi* and *Saogat*. She mostly wrote for *Nabanoor*, a progressive paper, which urged men and women alike to contribute articles. She published an outstanding, almost revolutionary, piece, 'Sultana's Dream', in English (later translated by her into Bengali), in the *Indian Ladies' Magazine* in 1905. Her books as already mentioned, were *Motichoor*, two volumes, (1907 & 1922), *Sultanar Swapna* (1908), *Padmarag* (1924) and *Abarodhbasini* (1931).

Rokeya wrote in Bengali (except for *Sultana's Dream*). Her principal theme was protest against the anti-woman customs of her community, and sarcasm was her principal stylistic weapon. Rokeya's language was simple and laced with bitterness. 'I almost die of shame every time I think of the pathetic cowardice of women,' says Rokeya, and conjures up images of bondage when describing women's love of ornaments'.

> Handcuffs for prisoners are made of steel; ours are made of gold and silver and we call them bangles. Perhaps in imitation of dog collars we have fashioned our neckbands, strung with jewels. Horses and elephants are tethered with iron chains and we happily put gold chains round our necks.[33]

Her anguished experience of *abarodh* – of all manner of stifling restrictions – since childhood, would explain the rebellious vehemence and biting sarcasm with which she lashed out against prevailing customs and modes of socialization of *zenana* women of her time.

Amidst a flowering of literary talent in Bengal – Mir Mosharraf Hossain, Imdadul Huq, Abdul Karim, Nausher Ali Khan, Abdul Hamid KhanYusufzai, Ismail Hossain Shirazi and Kaikobad to name a few – Rokeya, too, received recognition as a leading author during her lifetime. Her contribution to Bengali literature, her simple and incisive style of writing have been explored by recent researchers.[34] But they fall outside the scope of this work. It is her virulent protest against patriarchal customs, and her role as a social activist which is our area of interest here.

Rokeya's Standpoint

Rokeya believed that men and women constituted two equal parts of society. Hence, if one was weak the other could not thrive. In a satirical description to drive home the point, she wrote,

> Imagine you are standing in front of a full view mirror reflecting your image from your head down to your feet. The right half of your body is that of a man and the left of a woman. Your right arm is about thirty inches long and muscular, your left arm just twenty-four inches long and slender. Your right foot measures twelve inches, your left foot dainty and small. Your right hand shoulder is five feet in height, and the left only four feet, so you cannot stand straight and your head inclines to the left. Your right ear is as large as that of an elephant and your left ear is long like a donkey's. Now watch, watch

> carefully! If you do not like your image, then let us have a look at the two-wheeled cart. If one wheel of the cart is larger (the husband) than the other (the wife), then the cart can hardly move forward. It will go round and round at the same spot. This is precisely the condition of us Indians; we are hardly able to press forward.[35]

Why were women in India so oppressed? How could this be reversed? Rokeya's thesis was that if one had to start working for the *'unnati'* of women, one had to identify the factors responsible for the degradation. She identified two: (i) selfishness of men and (ii) mental slavery of women. Her basic statement was – and the idea occurred repeatedly in her writings – that women had become the slaves of men

> In this twentieth century what are we? Female slaves. They say that slavery has been abolished in the world. But have we been freed from our slavery? Why are we slaves? There are reasons.[36]

While investigating these reasons, Rokeya chastised women for accepting slavery without protest. Yet she also believed that their mental and physical faculties had been dulled through continuous neglect. 'The body is as much fossilized as the mind'. But then, whose fault was it that women had come to this state? Rokeya squarely blamed men and argued that women had been denied equal opportunities with men by the male-imposed social system.[37] To give but one example among many of the unfairness of the system, the women-turned-slaves were without proper homes. They merely resided in the homes of their male relations, and were subservient to them. These homes were for them more like walled prisons

> In this wide world, we have no place. Regardless of the state of our finances, we always live under someone's custody, always in the custodian's homes, not ours.... When the reeds covering our fragile cottages wear thin (that is, when we are poor)...when rain water leaks on our heads, even then we live in the houses of our custodians.... If perchance, we are daughters or daughters-in-law of a king and live in a palace, we are still inmates of the homes of our lords and masters.... Or, as daughters or daughters-in-law of an ordinary householder, wherever we are, we live under the domination of our masters.... We women cannot claim even a humble cottage as our home. No living creatures are as helpless as we, because they all have a home.[38]

In this essay Rokeya argued that in India a majority of women did not possess a home which they could call their own. In other words, she pressed one hundred years ago for what is still a missing right, a woman's right to the home. She pointed out that under Islamic law, women were, in fact, entitled to inherit their father's property, including land and houses – but the rule was never observed. *Men* denied women these rights, while most women were unaware of them, and could not exercise them even if they were aware. The necessary social support and access to tools for implementation were both lacking

Gender Equality

Rokeya reserved her bitterest words for the condition of women living under *abarodh.* She attacked *abarodh* mercilessly, distinguishing purdah from *abarodh.* Her approach was pragmatic, and she aimed for a workable solution by rejecting the worst form of suppression, but accommodating what she thought could not be done away with. Hence, in her article entitled *'Burqa'*, she stated that the custom was acceptable as far as the modesty of women was concerned; but to the extreme use of the purdah she was totally opposed. Confinement to a room or to the interior of the house was injurious to health; it denied women access to formal education and social interaction. This dulled their brains, and made them succumb to innocuous and worthless patterns of behaviour. She asked the orthodox opposition,

> Purdah does not mean deprivation of all rights and confinement within four walls. Have you read at all the Koran Sharif? Or do you just hang it around your neck?[39]

She prefaced her book *Abarodhbasini,* where she delineated with merciless sarcasm the pitiful condition of women in *abarodh*, with the words:

> When visiting Kurseong and Madhupur, I picked up many beautiful attractive stones. From the sea beaches of Madras and Orissa, I gathered seashells of many colours and shapes. And during my twenty years of service to society, I have collected only curses from our die-hard Mullas.... Every part of my body oozes sin, so I make no apology for any fault in this book.[40]

Rokeya made no secret of the fact that she considered men primarily responsible for the subjection of women. In *'Sultana's Dream'*, an extremely courageous, if bitterly satirical composition, she drew an imaginary picture of an ideal land, Ladyland, where women ruled, and laws and customs applicable to men and women in our society in India were inversely applied to them. This work portrays her as travelling to Ladyland in a dream and having conversations with one of the citizens, Sister Sara. To quote from the text written by her in English in the original version:

> I became very curious to know where the men were. I met more than a hundred women while walking there, but not a single man.
>
> 'Where are the men?' I asked her.
>
> 'In their proper places, where they ought to be'.
>
> 'Pray let me know what you mean by "their proper places".'
>
> 'Oh, I see my mistake, you cannot know our customs, as you were never here before. We shut our men indoors.'
>
> 'Just as we are kept in the zenana?'
>
> 'Exactly so.'

In revealing the obviously socially created fantasy world of Ladyland, Rokeya is at her most subversive. For the very construction of this world makes it clear that the one we live in is a construction as well, with man-made rules about how men and women should live. The imaginary conversation between the visitor and Sister Sara continues, now shifting the responsibility for change to women, challenging the very sense of the inevitability of the present social order:

> We have no hand or voice in the management of our social affairs. In India man is lord and master. He has taken to himself all powers and privileges and shut up the women in the zenana.
>
> Why do you allow yourself to be shut up?
>
> Because it cannot be helped as they are stronger than women.
>
> A lion is stronger than a man, but that does not enable him to dominate the human race. You have neglected the duty you have to yourselves and you have lost your natural rights by shutting your eyes to your own interests.[41]

Even more daring than this imaginary piece was an essay which had first appeared in the Brahmo journal *Mahila* in 1903 under the title '*Alankar Na* Badge of Slavery'. It was published again in *Nabanoor* in 1904 and was entitled *'Streejatir Abanati'* (The Degradation of Women). As a result of a storm of protest, when the article was re-published under a slightly altered title, *'Amader Abanati'* (Our Degradation) in *Motichoor,* the following portion was expunged:

> Whenever a woman has tried to raise her head, she has been brought down to her knees on the grounds of either religious impiety or scriptural taboo. Of course it cannot be ascertained with certainty, but this appears to have been the case. What we could not accept as correct, we had to concede later in the belief that it had the authority of a religious dictum.... Men have always propagated such religious texts as edicts of God to keep us women in the dark. It is not my intention to open a debate on the mysteries and spiritual aspects of any particular religion. I will merely restrict myself to discussing the social laws and regulations enshrined in religious texts... One can clearly understand that the scriptures are nothing but a set of regulating systems prescribed by men. We hear that the prescriptions were laid down by saints. If a woman could have become a saint, perhaps she would have prescribed opposite regulations.... We must not allow ourselves to bow down to the undue authority exercised by men in the name of religion. It has been seen time and again that the stricter the religious restriction, the more severe is the women's victimization.... Some may ask me, 'Why do you bring in religion when you are only discussing social conditions?' To which my reply is, 'Restrictions imposed by religion are responsible for tightening the chains of our slavery. Men are ruling over women under the pretext of laws prescribed by religion. That is why I am obliged to bring the question of religion into my discussion.[42]

Here Rokeya challenges religious scriptures as being simply male inventions, not divinely sanctioned, and thus her words are particularly threatening. For if scriptures are revealed as being written on behalf of the powerful and not on behalf of all of God's creation, then they lose their sanctity and legitimacy. The Word is no longer divine but vulnerable to challenge and rejection.

Education of Women

As the above quotes from *Sultana's Dream* show, Rokeya dreamed of Muslim women being able to liberate themselves. Education held the key to this possibility

> Like our bedrooms that shut out sunlight, our intellect is denied the fruits of enlightenment because there are no adequate schools and institutions of learning available to women. A man can go on learning, but will ever access to education be fully open to women? If one single liberal man attempts to assist us a thousand men put up obstacles.[43]

Most men disapproved of women's education. Society was prepared to ignore many failings in an uneducated woman. But if a woman with a modicum of education made a small mistake, everyone would ascribe it to the 'pernicious' effects of her education. Education for men was considered important because it was a passport to gainful employment. Women were not allowed even to go out, and so the question of their gainful employment did not arise at all. Even those who favoured some education for women were opposed to their higher education. According to most of them, a woman should be able to cook, should know how to sew, should be hard working in order to run the household, and might be allowed to read a book or two – that was more than enough. Rokeya herself was not against cooking or needlework for women. Food and clothes being the basic essentials of life, acquisition of skills in these fields is certainly necessary, but that does not mean that we confine our life solely to the kitchen.[44] The existing practice of keeping women illiterate was doing incalculable harm to Muslim society. Not only had it impeded the overall development of the community, Rokeya asserted, it was injurious to family life. Lack of education had created a mental gap between educated husbands and their uneducated wives. What mental affinity could there be between them to make partnership in married life fruitful?

Rokeya saw two major obstacles in the path of Muslim women's education. The first was the custom of strict purdah that denied women access to education. 'Removal of that artificial restriction keeping women confined to homes will lead to unrestricted spread of education among women', she said. 'And it will then be impossible to arrest the progress of such education'.[45] The second was the custom of early marriage for girls. In Rokeya's dreamland, Ladyland, education was spread far and wide among women. Early marriage had been stopped. No woman was allowed to marry before the age of twenty-one. Purdah had vanished. But in real life India, daughters were married off early, and most fathers discriminated between their sons and their daughters. Sons were encouraged to go through the university system, while daughters were not even permitted to finish school even by those who agreed to let them go to schools. The curriculum for girls was faulty as well. They were to learn the Arabic alphabets, then memorize the Koran without understanding the meaning of any of the verses. There were no suitable books on Persian and Urdu, and Bengali girls were not taught Bengali. Muslim men, advocated Rokeya, should come forward to help the cause of education of women. Let fathers spend money on daughters' schools rather than on their jewellery. Gold and silver were no substitute for learning. They decorated the body, not the mind. It was time to change priorities and give education to daughters.[46]

Education involved discipline and led to a broadening of the mind. Blind imitation of any particular country or community or memorizing a book was not its aim. 'We are born with certain natural faculties, gifted by God, and to hone these faculties through rigorous training is real education'. One must aim at both physical and mental efflorescence, and learn how to put to effective use all the organs gifted by God. One had to utilize usefully one's hands and legs, observe carefully with one's eyes, listen attentively with one's ears, and think intelligently with one's brains.[47] Rokeya placed particular emphasis on women's physical strength, and advised parents and teachers to give physical training to girls both at home and at school. She advocated teaching girls how to play with swords and rods and how to grind corn in indigenous machines known as *jata* (which would develop hand muscles)

> I ask for that kind of education that will equip women to acquire their rights as citizens...Education must be for both physical and mental advancement. Women must know that they were not born into this world merely to be decorative pieces in fine dresses and expensive jewelleries. On the contrary, they are born as women to achieve certain particular objectives. Their life is not to be dedicated for the sole purpose of pleasing their husbands; let them not be dependent on others for their upkeep.[48]

Rokeya did not believe that women's education should avoid having an economic function; one of her main arguments was the need for economic independence for women. Educated women should join the labour force. Why must parents of young girls bemoan the birth of their daughters, just because it was difficult to find suitable matches? 'Educate the daughters properly and let them go out and fend for themselves', she advised, questioning the orthodox view:

> Why should we not have access to gainful employment? What do we lack? Are we not able-bodied, and endowed with intelligence? In fact, why should we not employ the labour and energy that we expend on domestic chores in our husbands' homes to run our own enterprises?[49]

In this, once again, Rokeya was more radical than her contemporaries. At a time when Muslim women were under purdah, and 'progressive' Brahmo women like Swarnaprabha Basu (1869–1918) and Hemalata Sarkar (1868–1943) were defining educated women's dutiful role at home,[50] Rokeya talked of the right to employment. In 1905, when Rokeya was advocating this point of view some women like Kamini Roy (1864–1933) and Kadambini Ganguli (1861–1923) had already taken up paid jobs, but from them, too, no ideological assertion had come. Nor had society accepted gainful employment as desirable.[51] Rokeya, almost alone, dared to say that marriage was not the ultimate goal, family was not the ultimate end.

Rokeya was clear in her views about the dispensability of marriage/married life for a woman. In her novel, *Padmarag*, the two principal characters, Siddika and Latif were, according to the Muslim custom *akd*, technically husband and wife, although they had not met.

When they met, still unaware of their relationship to each other, they fell in love. Once the relationship became known, Latif begged Siddika repeatedly to come back to him. Siddika refused. Although fond of him, having once been rejected by his family– and consequently by him – she decided not to ignore the insult and return as an obedient wife. She would set an example for other girls. She explained her stand to her colleagues at Tarini Bhavan,

> Are we no more than just clay dolls that men can either accept us or reject us at will? I wish to tell men that opportunity knocks only once, and no more. We no longer live in the times when you could kick us and we licked your boots. I have taken the vow to dedicate my life to work for Tarini Bhavan in order to serve the cause of women, and in the process kill the purdah system, root and branch.[52]

It was not necessary for a woman to perform wifely duties under any circumstances, to put up with insults, oblivious of *atmaadar* (self-respect). The parting conversation between Latif and Siddika, reveals Rokeya's own view about women's independence:

> Latif: 'Tell me clearly, Siddika, will you not come home as my wife?'
> Siddika: 'No, I shall not. You go your way, and I shall take my own road'.[53]

Sakina, another character in the novel, says:

> I wish to demonstrate that there are recourses other than just living in the husband's home. To care for one's husband and his home is not the be-all and end-all of a woman's life. God has given us a very precious life – not to be misspent in cooking and domestic chores and to moan over destiny. We must declare our war against this unfair society.[54]

Obviously, Rokeya was constructing a thesis stating that for women marriage and maintaining the home were not as crucial as society made those out to be. What was important for them was the ability to 'fend for themselves' and live with dignity. Education was the only tool that could impart that ability. If marriage – and consequently good wifehood – was not the real goal of education, what was it? For Rokeya, the most crucial objective for a woman was social equality and independence

> The key question is how to get about regaining our lost position. What must we do to stand up and be counted as worthy daughters of our country? To start with, we need to take a firm resolve that in our daily life we shall be on an equal footing with men, and that we must have intense self-confidence not to feel a burden to any man. We will do whatever we have to do to gain equality with men. If the means to our attaining independence is through our ability to earn our living, then we must do so. From office workers to lawyers, and magistrates, even judges-we shall get entry to all jobs and professions, presently the privileged precincts of men. Perhaps fifty years down the road we may see a woman installed as Viceroy, thus elevating the status of all women.[55]

Equality with men was for Rokeya the ultimate goal of a woman's education. An additional advantage of education was the potential for paid employment. Ghulam Murshid is right when he comments that no other contemporary woman, whether Hindu or Muslim, had staked such a claim to equality.[56] Jnanadanandini Devi (1852–1941), Kamini Roy, Krishnabhabini Das (1864–1919) and even Sarala Devi Chaudhurani (1872–1945), while deploring the injustice done to women and trying to improve the quality of their life, had not asked for gender equality. Rokeya stands unique among her contemporaries in this arena.

She tried to implement some of these ideas through a school that she established first in Patna and later transferred to Calcutta – the Sakhawat Memorial Girls' School, which became the centre of her life from its inception. The school was an Urdu-medium one, but Rokeya tried to set up a Bengali-medium section. She started her school without any personal experience of the system of school education, but she gathered knowledge by borrowing ideas from the Brahmos, the pioneers of women's education – a pointer to Rokeya's liberal attitude. She visited Brahmo Samaj and well-known girls' schools in Calcutta, observed their techniques, and imitated as well as modified them. Within a mere five years, the number of students, initially eight, increased ten times. Along with the Muslims, a few Hindu and Parsi students also joined the school. At the annual assembly in 1914, Rokeya read her annual report in English. She mentioned that the two major problems the school faced were getting adequate transport for the students, and finding suitable and qualified teachers.[57] The bus that the school used to bring girls from different parts of the city was absolutely closed–for the sake of purdah. In Rokeya's description, 'There is a strip of narrow wire netting on the back door of the bus, and a similar narrow strip in the front. But for these 18 inch by 3 inch strips of netting the bus would have been totally air-tight.' Girls fainted due to lack of air, and the net was later replaced by curtains. Yet, says Rokeya,

> I received four letters by the evening post – none with the sender's address. One letter, written in English, was signed just 'Brothers-in-Islam'. The other three were written in Urdu, two unsigned and the third carrying five signatures. The theme of the letters was identical. After conveying their good wishes for the school, the writers complained about the unsatisfactory purdah arrangements for the school bus. The screens covering the sides of the bus get wind-blown, thus exposing the interior of the bus. If this was not rectified by the following day, the writers warned that they would all be perforce obliged to write to the many Urdu daily newspapers denouncing the school, and also see to it that no girls ever used this purdah-less bus service.[58]

It may be mentioned here that Bethune School had faced the same problems initially, although under full Government patronage. There was a dearth of teachers, a dearth of students (who had to be persuaded to attend) and ridicule greeted those who went to school in carriages. The bus that brought girls to Bethune School was jeered at, as recounted by a contemporary educationist, Shivanath Shastri

> 'Treat daughters with affection and educate them with utmost care' was the legend – taken from an ancient Buddhist text – inscribed on the carriage

> employed by the just-established school for girls. Whenever the carriage was out on the road, people would gape at it and talk. Rude remarks were passed at the cost of the little innocent schoolgirls. Comments, such as, 'If things could get worse in this present dark age of *Koli*, then they have already done so,' were frequently heard.[59]

The history of women's education in India, among both the Hindu and the Muslim communities, is by and large the same. The principal difference was that Hindus had started earlier, but both faced the same problems, the same debate, and the same hurdles.

The curriculum at Sakhawat School in its early years included Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Bengali and English, as well as mathematics and needlework. By 1930 the school had become a high school with a secondary school curriculum. It also emphasized basic household skills: cooking, sewing, child-care and gardening. Furthermore, physical education and some vocational skills: nursing and handicrafts, were also taught.

It is interesting to note that a few years later, in 1931, Rokeya said in a speech that the school had been set up because she wanted 'the social welfare of the Bengali Muslim community'. Muslim girls needed formal educational institutions to equip themselves with knowledge and become 'model Muslim women'. Moreover, Muslim men desired educated wives, and as educated Muslim women were not available, they were ready to marry women from other communities. The solution was to create a model school for Muslim girls.[60] In the same year in an article on 'Educational Ideals for Modern Indian Girls', published in *The Mussalman*, Rokeya adopted a traditional approach. 'We must seek the elements of value in our ancient heritage ... our girls should not only obtain university degrees, but must be ideal daughters, wives and mothers – or I may say, obedient daughters, loving sisters, dutiful wives and instructive mothers'.

The familiar Rokeya touch here is conspicuous by absence. Obviously, Rokeya was strategically appealing to certain segments of the Muslim community for assistance for the maintenance and development of her school. She projected before her audience and readers a modified and noncontroversial goal of education. It is easier to communicate radical thoughts through fiction: the genre allows it. Rokeya knew how to voice protest through the medium of the pen. But in actual practice, often one is compelled to make compromises, especially when one has to address conservative elements and solicit their support. Beliefs occasionally have to yield place to practical needs. Rokeya had the interests of the school at heart. The least radical of her writings are, therefore, her appeals to justify the existence of her school.

Rokeya made yet another conciliatory gesture for the sake of her school. As we have seen, it was *abarodh* that constituted the prime target of her battle. She was at heart not really supportive of purdah either. In her own words,

> This system reminds me of the lethal carbonic acid gas, which being a painless killer, its victims are never alert to its hazards. Women kept confined to the home die a slow death by the effect of this fatal gas known as purdah.[61]

Yet she herself observed purdah for strategic reasons, knowing fully well that non-observance of something so ingrained as custom would alienate many, who might not agree to send their children to her school. Once she said,

> I am getting on in age and may die any day, but I do not wish the school which I have run for so many years to die with my death. This is the fear that haunts me, so I had to make a compromise in the interest of the school by observing purdah.[62]

Thus, a firebrand litterateur had perforce to be more pragmatic and perspicacious when it came to real issues of social reform. Perhaps, like many other early feminists elsewhere, Rokeya instinctively knew how to bend in order not to break.

Organizing Women

Rokeya did not believe that men were by and large supportive of women's changing status – certainly they had not been so in the past. Women would have to fight for themselves. That would not be easy. There was stiff opposition to encounter. Yet the battle had to be fought. It was time to wake up

> My sisters! Rub your eyes and wake up-march forward. Mothers, please declare that you are no more animals. Sisters, please deny that you are inanimate objects like furniture. And daughters, please aver that you are not decorative pieces to be conserved with jewellery and preserved in a safe. And together shout: we are human beings. And demonstrate through your work that we women are half of the best of the world. In truth, we are the begetters of the world.[63]

To drive home the point, she appealed to their religious sentiments

> Mothers, sisters, daughters! Come, get up, and leave your comfortable beds; go forward. The muazzin calls, can you not hear him, the summons from Allah? Do not laze in your beds, the night is over, it is now dawn, the muazzin is calling to the Faithful for prayers. Elsewhere in the world women have woken up, they are protesting against all social evils. Women have risen to become Education Ministers; there are now women doctors, philosophers, scientists, ministers of wars, generals of the army, writers, poets, etc. And we, women of Bengal, are in deep slumber in a dark and damp room, and dying in thousands of consumption.[64]

It was time for women to organize themselves. Men had so far taken charge of women and controlled them in the name of protecting them

> For some time now our masters have been regarding us as if we are their valuable ornaments. Perhaps that is why so many 'Societies for the Protection of Women' are being founded. Truly, since we are nothing but live luggage pieces, alert watchmen are needed to keep an eye on us lest we get stolen! My hapless sisters! Does not this invoke a sense of humiliation in you? If it does, then why do you suffer silently such indignities?[65]

To be equal with men, women had to build their own power-base. You all club together and form various associations to protect your rights and demands.[66] This thought was brilliantly portrayed in her novel *Padmarag*. The question that was asked was: how would women fight against the unfair social customs that dictated that a wife could be abandoned at will by her husband, or that compelled her to live with a mad man or with co-wives? In *Padmarag*, Tarini Bhavan (literally, an abode for protection) was a place where distressed women found a comfortable shelter to live in. In response to the question whether there was any panacea for women, Saudamini, one of the characters in the novel, asserts,

> Yes, there is. And that protection will come from this Society for Protection from Cruelty to Women of Tarini Bhavan. Come, come to us; all you neglected, abandoned and helpless women. Then we shall declare war against these unfair social conditions and Tarini Bhavan will be our fortress.[67]

Through *Padmarag*, Rokeya was sending word out to all women to form their own associations and centres for the protection of women. Through the same novel, she also sent powerful messages of secularism. In *Padmarag*'s Tarini Bhavan, Hindu, Muslim and Christian women lived like sisters, enjoying a deep bond of mutual respect and love under the headship of a Hindu woman. In her Preface to the novel, Rokeya uses a metaphor to show that for the truly devoted there was no difference between one religion and another

> Religion is like a three-storied mansion. The ground floor has many chambers housing Hindus with their many factions, such as Brahmins, Sudras, etc., Muslims in their many communities, like Shia, Sunni, Hanafi, Sufi, etc, and similarly, many Christians in their different denominations, Roman Catholics, Protestants, and the like. Go to the first floor; there are only Muslims, only Hindus, with no divisions into factions. On the second floor there is just one chamber inhabited by only people, all the same; there are no Hindus, no Muslims; all are worshipping only one God. In the final analysis, there is nothing–except the great God.[68]

By the time *Padmarag* was published (although written much earlier), women's organizations formed by women had already begun to appear in India. Bharat Stree Mahamandal, the Women's India Association and the All India Women's Conference were women's organizations set up by women.[69] The *Anjuman-i-Khavatin-i-Islam* (All India Muslim Ladies' Conference) was set up in February 1914, and in 1916 Rokeya founded the Anjuman-i-Khavatin-i-Islam in Calcutta. In the formative days of this association, Rokeya faced much derision when she canvassed from door to door to interest people in her project. No one could conceive of Muslim women leaving their homes and coming out to attend the meetings of an association. Many women, used to staying at home, would have liked to respond, but courage failed them in the face of the strong antagonism of the family. Rokeya encouraged such women to come out on the plea of visiting relations, and then go and attend meetings. Many of these women had little or no idea of what an association was supposed to do or what a meeting was like. Shamsunnahar Mahmud, Rokeya's biographer, recalls an amusing incident. Apparently, after much persuasion, a lady of an educated Muslim family had agreed to attend a meeting of the *Anjuman*. When the meeting was over and the assembled women were on their way out, this new woman, much puzzled, asked where the association was located and where the meeting was she was supposed to attend. It took some time to convince her that she had just attended the meeting and that now it was over.[70]

Rokeya devoted considerable time to the *Anjuman*. The programme of the *Anjuman* comprised convening meetings of members, fostering amity amongst them, initiating discussions on issues related to women, disseminating knowledge pertaining to healthcare and childcare and rendering aid to poor people. Vocational training and elementary education were accorded high priority in the programme. It was decided that as long as the Association would not be able to establish suitable schools to provide vocational training to women, efforts would be made to set up training centres in various localities. These centres would offer training for income generating occupations, such as garment making, wickerwork, making preserves and condiments. Any Muslim woman was eligible to be a member of the Association. Each member had to pay a minimum subscription of three rupees a year. A working committee of twelve members was constituted for the management of the Association. There was to be a President, four Vice Presidents and a Secretary. It was mandatory for at least one of these office bearers to have knowledge of the English language. Rokeya was made the first Secretary of the Association.

In 1919, the Calcutta Anjuman hosted the all-India meeting of the *Anjuman-i-Khavatin-i-Islam*. Tayyiba Begum Khediv Jung came from Hyderabad to preside. Rokeya's local committee had arranged a venue for the meeting in Ripon Street, but the purdah arrangements were deemed inadequate by the Aligarh-Hyderabad-based delegates and the venue had to be shifted.[71] To Aligarh women purdah was a useful social marker, to Rokeya, it was an unavoidable necessity. However, the incident revealed Rokeya's lack of success in getting along with the more dominant Aligarh group. So, Rokeya's efforts at organizing women remained confined to Bengal. Her *Anjuman,* known as the *Nikhil Banga Muslim Mahila Samiti*, was a Bengal-based organization, with little links with other parts of India. If we were to evaluate Rokeya's abilities as an organizer, we would have to say that her organizing skills did not match those of some of the contemporary political women or her own abilities as author and thinker. In any case, the task before her was stupendous, equally stupendous was the opposition. It would need generations to achieve the changes Rokeya sought to create.

Political Involvement

Unusually for that time, to Rokeya, the battle against gender subjection was more crucial than that against colonial subjection; the former was far older and more deep rooted than the latter, although the latter appeared to be the key issue before her contemporaries. To eradicate the former was her life's ambition, and she fought her battle through her books. Nonetheless, her writings reveal her protest against colonial subjection as well. She took no active role in the *Swadeshi* movement, or the latter-day freedom movement. The nationalism that developed during the *Swadeshi* Movement had strong Hindu overtones. The Hindu concept of motherland as the mother God was popularized, and naturally this failed to appeal to the Muslim community.[72] Rokeya, however, was not swayed by the growing Hindu

Muslim tension in the political arena that was being artificially whipped up among the two communities at that time.

When in 1907 the Congress session broke up among discord, Rokeya wrote *Muktiphal* (The Fruit Called Freedom). The gist of the story is that freedom was being delayed because of differences of opinion among brothers. It was only women who, without quarrelling among themselves, could serve the motherland and bring freedom.[73] Again, in a poem entitled *'Nirupama Bir'* (A Hero without Peer) she paid homage to Kanailal, a *biplabi* (revolutionary) during the swadeshi period.[74] In the piece, '*Baligarta*', (published in 1928), declared to be 'an absolutely true story', Rokeya was with Kamaladidi, a Congress worker promoting the *charka* and *khaddar*, and her associate Jaheda Bibi, who also wore *khaddar*.[75] Rokeya penned a poem (published in 1922, written against the backdrop of the Non-cooperation Movement), ridiculing some *bhadralok* collaborators of the Raj. A stanza, purporting to be an appeal from these gentlemen not to strip them of their 'honorific titles' (such as Rai Bahadur) awarded by the British Government, would read like this:

> The dumb and silent have no foes
> That's how the saying goes
> All of us with titled tails
> Keep so quiet telling no tales
> Then comes a bolt from the blue
> Passes belief, but it's true
> All of you who did not speak
> Will lose your tails fast and quick
> Come my friends and declare now
> In a loud and loyal vow
> Listen, ye world, we are not
> God's truth, a seditious lot.[76]

Thus Rokeya wrote. She went no further, and did not participate in active politics, except in the struggle for votes for women. When in 1923, a women's delegation, led by Kamini Ray, met the Viceroy, Lord Lytton, to seek support for women's right to vote in all elections, Rokeya joined the group.[77]

CONCLUSION

Rokeya's politics was primarily a politics of gender. Her revolt was against gender injustice, her aim was gender equality. Being acutely conscious of the pecking order in gender relations, she asked some very pertinent questions indeed,

> May I ask, Astronomer sir, why do we not find your wife with you? When you are engaged in measuring the distance between the earth and the sun or the stars, why is your wife occupied in the measurement of pillow covers?[78]

The concept of conjugal partnership and equality was with her throughout from the beginning to the end of her writing career. In her last incomplete essay entitled '*Narir Adhikar*' (The Rights of Women), she wrote,

> Marriages in our community are contracted with the consent of both the bride and the bridegroom as laid down by the tenets of our religion. That being so, God forbid, if there has to be a divorce, then surely this must also be with the mutual consent of both the husband and the wife. But in reality that is not so; it is entirely a one-sided affair, only the husbands being allowed to divorce. I have known many instances of marriage break-ups among middle class families of North Bengal, and it is always the husbands separating from their wives on the flimsiest of grounds.[79]

She had asserted as early as 1905 that a husband should be called not *swami* (master), but *ardhanga* (half of the same body).[80] This could well be part of an early feminist manifesto.

What Rokeya said was consistently defiant, and consequently evoked severe criticism. When *'Strijatir Abanati'* (Degradation of Women) first appeared, it shocked most readers. Nausher Ali Khan asked, 'Women readers! Do you really believe that you are slaves?...Was it really necessary to use such uncalled for unfair words (against men's use of religion)? Would there have been any problem in searching the causes of your degradation if such irrelevant words were not used?' His advice to Rokeya and indeed to all women was simple. 'By all means, be independent, if that is what you like, but do take care that you do not abuse your freedom'. S.A. Al Moosvi affirmed in the same journal, 'Women can never be equals of men.... That will be going against Nature'. Even the literary critic of *Nabanoor* commented that Rokeya's essays were influenced by Christian missionaries. 'The author of *Motichoor* is constantly whipping us. We do not think that it will yield any fruitful result'.[81] *Mihir o Sudhakar* published a stronger condemnation. 'She has made some very fallacious remarks on the time honoured sacred books of Islamic religion.... She has also averred that that these sacred books are the work of mortal men. If she really thinks that her theory is true then one can only conclude that she can do no good to our country'.[82]

Nor was the response from women themselves too favourable. One woman wrote, 'However powerful her language, the conclusions she arrived at are objectionable and in bad taste'. Another woman from Orissa warned that women's freedom, like everything else, should have a limit. A third one asked, 'Is it necessary to condemn men so rudely in order to attain women's progress?'[83] And when *Bhrata Bhagni* (Brother-Sister) was published, a woman bitterly complained, 'We recognize sister Hossain as the spokeswoman of our society. We do not expect to hear such things from her.' A reviewer of *Abarodhbasini* (Woman Confined) wrote in the *Masik Mohammadi*, 'Her readers might have been more appreciative had the distinguished writer desisted from narrating fairy tales in the name of denouncing the purdah system'.[84]

Clearly, Rokeya's ideas were ahead of her times. The resistance she met from her contemporaries can even be seen as a conservative reaction that survives to this very day. Rokeya's world view threatened the very foundations of patriarchy. The 'enlightened' men had wanted educated but *docile* women; they certainly had not bargained for educated female rebels. It can be safely argued in the context of both Hindu and Muslim social reforms that 'Embedded in the explicit programme of the reform movement was massive ideological reconstruction of patriarchy and gender.'[85] Men, both Hindu and Muslim, in colonial Bengal promoted women's education to ensure better performance of women's traditional roles in the context of colonial rule.[86] Most women who received the benefit of education, blessed by such male patronage, in turn internalized the male definition of women's destined role in the family as sanctified truth, the questioning of which would be nothing short of sacrilegious. In the early twentieth century, therefore, most men and women in the Muslim community opposed Rokeya's rebellious assertions directed against her own society.

Today, however, it is quite a different story. Rokeya's birthplace, Rangpur, is now in Bangladesh. It may be recalled here that the language issue was one of the root causes that gave birth to the State of Bangladesh. Rokeya was a Bengali par excellence. Born in a family that valued only Urdu or Persian and denigrated Bengali, married to an Urdu-speaking man, she nurtured and sustained a passionate love for the Bengali language. She said,

> Whatever may be the local language of other places, my concern is what should be the local language for Calcutta. After managing Sakhawat Memorial School for sixteen years, I have come to realize that the local Muslims are motherless, because they do not have a mother tongue.[87]

No wonder, in Bangladesh, which fiercely upholds the pride in the mother tongue, Rokeya has become the model of a woman leader for the articulate and educated section in the country.

Rokeya was chiefly concerned with Muslim women of her own community. If we look at the overall movement that took shape in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, we realize that Rokeya provided critical leadership in promoting a gendered form of Bengali-Muslim nationalism. If Imdadul Huq and Siraji elaborated on this nationalism in essays, if Bulbul Chowdhury expressed it through dance, and Abbasuddin through music, Rokeya took it to the women's front. She was, as Abdul Mannan Syed observes, a part of the emergence of a new *'jagaran'*,[88] of the birth of a new multi-dimensional identity.

Her contemporary biographer Shamsunnahar said, 'From the very beginning until the last, Rokeya had one politics–*nari jagaran* (awakening of women)'.[89] Motahar Hossain Sufi, a latter-day biographer agrees. 'She was the first person to light the torch to set Bengali Muslim women on their path to emancipation.[90] Maleka Begum, an author-activist in today's Bangladesh, confirms. 'Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain is hailed as the trailblazer in the cause of the awakening of Muslim women, because no one before her had shaken up the community so powerfully as she did with her movement, challenging the exploitation of, and the discrimination against, women.[91]

Rokeya was a feminist critique on two fronts. She threw her almost audacious challenge at the two pillars of patriarchy – the institutions of the family and religion in their existing form. I must explain that she did not ask for the dissolution of the institution of the family – she demanded its restructuring on the basis of man-woman equality. Nor did she condemn religion; she protested against its misconstruction and misuse. Her rebellion was against the control of women by men, in all areas, the spiritual and the temporal. Today the feminist movement worldwide is still grappling with the twin problems, and has not yet been able to reach a conclusive agenda or offer an alternative model. Rokeya's solution was clear. To men, she said: give women equality and recognize their contributions. To women her call was: 'wake up.'

NOTES

Note: An earlier version of this article was included in my book *Early Feminists of Colonial Bengal: Sarala Devi Chaudhurani and Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain*, OUP, 2002.

1. Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, '*Bayuyane Panchash Mile*' (Fifty Miles in an Aeroplane), in Abdul Qadir (ed.), *Begum Rokeya Rachanavali* (henceforward, *Rachanavali*), Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1993, p. 282.
2. For a history of social reforms, see Nemai Sadhan Bose, *Indian Awakening and Bengal*, Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1976; David Kopf, *The Brahmo Samaj and the Shaping of the Modern Mind*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977; Charles Heimsath, *Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social Reform*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964; Kenneth Jones, 'Socio-Religious Movements and Changing Gender Relationships among Hindus of British India', in J. Bjorkman (ed.), *Fundamentalism, Revivalists and Violence in South Asia*, New Delhi, 1988; Kenneth Jones, *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
3. See Rafiuddin Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims, 1871–1906: A Quest for Identity* (chapter 3), New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1981.
4. See Rafiuddin Ahmed, 'Intro', in Rafiuddin Ahmed (ed.), *Understanding the Bengal Muslims: Interpretative Essays*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001, esp. p. 15. Ahmed argues that the British rule created even among ordinary Bengali Muslims in rural areas 'a sense of deprivation that was uncommon to the Hindus'. They thought that the British had wrested power from 'them', as if to suggest that they had descended from ancestors who had ruled India long before the coming of the British. Essays in Ahmed's edited book offer persuasive explanations of how the Bengali Muslim identity was gradually shaped.
5. Wakil Ahmed, *Unish Shatake Bangali Mussalmaner Chinta Chetanar Dhara* (The Thoughts of the Bengali Muslim in the Nineteenth Century), Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1983, vol. 1, p. 36.
6. Anisuzzaman, *Muslim Manas O Bangla Sahitya* (Muslim Mentality and Bengali Literature), Calcutta: Muktadhara, 1971, p. 3. Shamsul Alam also says, 'The decade of the 1870s can be described as the period of the *jagaran* (awakening) of the Muslim mind'. Muhammad Shamsul Alam, *Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain: Jiban O Sahityakarma* (Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, Life and Literary Works), Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1989, p. 47.
7. Wakil Ahmed, *Unish Shatake,* vol.1, p. viii.
8. G.F.I. Graham, *The Life and Works of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1974, p. 52. David Lelyveld, *Aligarh's First Generation: Muslim Solidarity in British India,* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978, gives an insight about the Aligarh College, its founder and the early group of teachers and scholars.
9. For Abdul Latif's life and works, see Enamul Haq (ed.), N*awab Bahadur Abdul Latif: His Writings and Related Documents*, Dhaka, 1968; Jayanti Maitra, *Muslim Politics in Bengal, 1855–1906,* Calcutta: K.P. Bagchi, 1984, gives a short summary and makes interesting comparative points regarding the political and social backgrounds of Sir Syed and Nawab Abdul Latif, pp. 102–123.
10. M.A. Rahim, *Banglar Musalmander Itihas, 1707–1947* (A History of Bengali Muslims), Dhaka: Ahmad Publishing House, 1989, pp. 155–62. In the Central Muhammedan Association, non-Muslims could attend. In 1879, one of the seven members of the Executive Council was a Hindu, Ganesh Chandra Chanda. The Association often participated in the meetings organized by the Hindus to articulate anti-colonial sentiments

In 1885, the British Indian Association of Surendranath Banerjea and the Central Muhammedan Association jointly convened a national conference. Anisuzzaman, *Muslim Manas*, p.85.

11. See Anisuzzaman, *Muslim Manas*, pp. 86–87; Sufia Ahmed, *Muslim Community in Bengal, 1884–1912,* Dhaka: Oxford University Press, 1974, pp. 10–15.
12. These newspapers and journals played a pioneering role in facilitating a major social transformation. Gita Chattopadhyay has done an extremely helpful and detailed research on the foundation of the journals in Bengal in early twentieth century. Geeta Chattopadhyay, *Bangla Samayik Patrikapanji* (Bengali Journals), Vol.1, 1900–1914 & Vol. 2. 1915–1930, Calcutta: Bangiya Granthagar Parishad, 1990 & 1994.
13. For a discussion on Muslim identity, see Salahuddin Ahmed, *Muslim Community in Bengal 1884–1912,* Dhaka, 1974; Rafiuddin Ahmed, *The Bengali Muslims*, Sufia Ahmed, *Muslim Community in Bengal*; Zoya Hasan, 'Muslim Women and the Debate on Legal Reforms', in Bharati Ray & Aparna Basu (eds.), *From Independence Towards Freedom: Indian Women since 1947*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 120–134; Zoya Hasan (ed.), *Forging Identities: Gender, Communities and the State,* New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1994; Dhurjoti Prosad De, *Bengal Muslims in Search of Social identity, 1905–47*, Dhaka: Dhaka University Press, 1998.
14. Wakil Ahmed, *Unish Shatake,* vol. 2, p. 17.
15. For details, see Morshed Shafiul Hasan, *Begum Rokeya: Samay O Sahitya* (Begum Rokeya: Times and Works), Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1996, esp. p. 44.
16. For a discussion on Hindu social reformers and the 'women's question', see, Bharati Ray, *Early Feminists of Colonial India: Sarala Devi Chaudhurani and Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain,* New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 29–42; Meredith Borthwick, *The Changing Role of Women in Bengal, 1849–1905*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984, pp. 26–108; Uma Chakravarti, 'Whatever Happened to the Vedic Dasi? Orientalism, Nationalism, and a Script for the Past', in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (eds.) *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History,* New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1989, pp. 47–60; Partha Chatterjee, The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question', in ibid., 235–243, esp. pp. 237–8.; Dipesh Chakravarty, 'The Difference-Deferral of a Colonial Modernity: Public Debates on Domesticity in British Bengal', in David Arnold and David Hardiman (eds.), *Subaltern Studies* VIII, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994.
17. Sonia Nishat Amin, 'The Orthodox Discourse and the Emergence of the Muslim *Bhadromohila* in Early Twentieth Century Bengal, 1900–47', in Rajat Kanta Ray (ed.), *Mind, Body and Society: Life and Mentality in Colonial Bengal,* New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 394.
18. See Sonia Nishat Amin, 'The Early Muslim *Bhadramahila:* The Growth of Learning and Creativity, 1876–1939', in Bharati Ray (ed.), *From the Seams of History: Essays on Indian Women*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 119.
19. For an elucidation, see Bharati Ray, ed. *Sekaler Narishiksha: Bamabodhini Patrika, 1863–1922* (Women's Education of Yester Years: *Bamabodhini Patrika*), Calcutta: Calcutta University Press, 1994, pp. 31–2. Sonia Nishat Amin observes that actually there was

not much difference between the Hindu social reformers and their Muslim counterparts. Both came from the educated middle class. The similarity of their ideas could be traced to certain core class, cultural and educational traits, shared by the middle class professional gentry of both communities. And the women of both these communities, of the same class, had much in common. See Sonia Nishat Amin, 'The Early Muslim *Bhadramahila*', in Bharati Ray (ed.), *From the Seams*, p. 108.

20. Imdadul Huq, *Nabanoor,* cited in Wakil Ahmed, *Unish Shatake,* vol. 1, p. 132.
21. Sonia Nishat Amin, 'The Early Muslim *Bharamahila'*, in Bharati Ray (ed.), *From the Seams*, p. 114.
22. Maleka Begum, *Banglar Nari Andolan* (Women's Movement in Bengal), Dhaka: Dhaka University Press, 1989, pp. 44–49, gives a succinct summary of the history of the early years of Muslim women's education. She also gives data on the number and ratio of Muslim girls in schools in 1881–82.
23. Motahar Hossain Sufi, *Begum Rokeya: Jibon O Sahitya* (Begum Rokeya: Life and Literature), Dhaka: Dhaka University Press, 1986, pp. 1–4; Shamsunnahar Mahmud, *Rokeya Jiboni* (Biography of Rokeya) Dhaka: Sahitya Parishad, 1996, p. 14.
24. Rokeya S. Hossain, 'Lukano Ratan' (A Hidden jewel), in *Rachanavali*, pp. 260–3, esp. p. 262.
25. Cited in Motahar Hossain Sufi, *Begum Rokeya*, p. 8.
26. Rokeya S. Hossain, *Abarodhbasini* (The Woman Confined), in *Rachanavali*, p. 47.
27. Ibid., pp. 447–8.
28. *Padmarag*, 'Dedication', in *Rachanavali,* p. 289.
29. Shamsunnahar Mahmud, *Rokeya Jiboni,* p. 20.
30. *Rachanavali*, p. 70.
31. Ghulam Murshid, *Rasasundari Theke Rokeya: Nari Pragatir Eksho Bachhar* (From Rasasundari to Rokeya: A Hundred Years of Women's Advancement), Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1993, p. 134.
32. Muhammad Shamsul Alam, *Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain,* p. 110.
33. Rokeya S. Hossain, '*Strijatir Abanati'* (The Degradation of Women), in *Rachanavali*, p. 11.
34. For a detailed discussion, see Abdul Mannan Syed, *Begum Rokeya*, Dhaka: Abasar Prakashan Sanstha, 1996.
35. Rokeya S. Hossain, '*Ardhangi*' (The Other Half), in *Rachanavali,* p. 29.
36. Rokeya S. Hossain, '*Strijatir Abanati'*, in *Rachanavali*, p. 9.
37. Ibid.
38. Rokeya S. Hossain, *'Griha'* (The Home), in *Rachanavali,* p. 64.
39. Rokeya S. Hossain, '*Tin Kure'* (Three Idle Men), in *Rachanavali*, p. 486.
40. Rokeya S. Hossain, Preface, *Abarodhbasini,* in *Rachanavali,* p. 431.
41. Rokeya S. Hossain, *Sultana's Dream* in *Rachanavali*, pp. 532–3.
42. See Abdul Qadir, 'Introduction', in *Rachanavali,* pp. 11–2.
43. Rokeya S. Hossain, *'Strijatir Abanati'*, in *Rachanavali*, p. 17.
44. Rokeya S. Hossain, '*Ardhangi'*, in *Rachanavali*, p. 34.
45. Rokeya S. Hossain, '*Bhrata-Bhagni'* (Brothers and Sisters), in *Rachanavali*, p. 476
46. Rokeya S. Hossain, *'Burqa'*, in *Rachanavali*, p. 52.
47. Rokeya S. Hossain *'Strijatir Abanati'*, in *Rachanavali*, p. 18.

48. Rokeya S. Hossain, *'Subeh Sadek'*, in *Rachanavali*, p. 272.
49. Rokeya S. Hossain, *'Strijatir Abanati'*, in *Rachanavali*, p. 21.
50. Swarnaprabha and Hemalata asked only widows to work. For their views, see *Bharatamahila*, June1907 & *Bamabodhini Patrika*, November 1908.
51. According to the Census of 1901, in Bengal only 1156 women worked as teachers, 67 worked as clerks, 849 were nurses, and 151 were doctors. Ghulam Murshid, *Reluctant Debutante*, Rajshahi: Sahitya Sansad 1984, p. 145. Muslim middle class women were yet to join the work force.
52. Rokeya S. Hossain, *Padmarag*, in *Rachanavali*, p. 414. This also indicates Rokeya's strong opposition to purdah and her keen desire to abolish the custom.
53. Ibid., p. 420.
54. Ibid., p. 357.
55. Rokeya S. Hossain,*'Strijatir Abanati'*, in *Rachanavali*, pp. 20–1.
56. Ghulam Murshid, *Rasasundari Theke*, p. 145.
57. For a detailed description of the School, see Tahmina Alam, *Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain: Chinta-Chetanar Dhara o Samajkarma* (Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain: Thoughts and Works for Society), Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1996, pp. 81–108. Despite Rokeya's efforts, as late as 1927, out of 114 girls in the school, only two were Bengali speaking. Sonia Amin, 'The Early Muslim *Bhadramahila*', in Bharati Ray (ed.), *From the Seams*, p. 120. This shows that the Muslim elite of Calcutta, whether they belonged to the aristocracy or the new professional middle class, favoured a pan-Islamic, pro-Urdu culture. Rokeya, however, continued to write in Bengali and tried to promote Bengali in her school, indicating her pride in her Bengali identity.
58. Begum Rokeya, *Abarodhbasni*, in Rachanavali, pp. 467–8.
59. Shivnath Shastri, *Ramatanu Lahiri o Tatkalin Bangasamaj* (Ramtanu Lahiri and Bengali Society of his Times), Calcutta: New Age Publishers, 1955, p. 140.
60. Rokeya S. Hossain, '*Dhangsher Pathe Bangiya Muslim* (Bengali Muslims on the Way to Ruin), in *Rachanavali*, pp. 276–7.
61. Rokeya S. Hossain, '*Bangiya Nari Shiksha*' (Women's Education in Bengal), in *Rachanavali*, p. 257.
62. Cited in Morshed Shafiul Hasan, *Begum Rokeya*, p. 32.
63. Rokeya S. Hossain, *'Subeh Sadek'*, in *Rachanavali*, p. 272.
64. Ibid., p. 271.
65. Ibid.
66. Ibid., p. 272.
67. Rokeya S. Hossain, *Padmarag*, in *Rachanavali*, p. 357.
68. Rokeya S. Hossain, *Nibedan* (Preface), ibid., p. 291.
69. For details about these organizations, see Aparna Basu & Bharati Ray, *Women's Struggle: A History of the All India Women's Conference* (chapter 1), New Delhi: Manohar, 1990.
70. Shamsunnahar Mahmud, *Rokeya Jiboni*, pp. 50–1.
71. For details, see Gail Minault, *Secluded Scholars: Women's Education and Muslim Social Reform in Colonial India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998, pp. 291–3.
72. See Bharati Ray, 'The Freedom Movement and Feminist Consciousness in Bengal, 1905–1929', in Bharati Ray (ed.) *From the Seams of History*, p. 183.

73. Rokeya S. Hossain, 'Muktiphal' in *Rachanavali,* pp. 198–220.
74. Rokeya S. Hossain, 'Nirupama Bir', in *Rachanavali,* pp. 526–7.
75. Rokeya S. Hossain, 'Baligarta' in *Rachanavali,* pp. 492–7.
76. Translated by Sukhendu Ray from Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, 'Appeal', in *Rachanavali,* p. 524.
77. For details of the struggle for votes for women, see Barbara Southard, The Women's Movement and Colonial Politics in Bengal: The Quest for Political Rights, Education and Social Reform Legislations, Delhi: Manohar publishers, 1995.
78. Rokeya S. Hossain, *'Ardhangi',* in *Rachanavali,* p. 30.
79. Moshfeka Mahmud, *Patre Rokeya Parichiti* (Introducing Rokeya through her Letters), Dhaka: Sahitya Parishad, 1996, pp. 34–5. Rokeya was opposed to the system of unilateral *talak,* as well as child marriage and marriage of old men to young girls. See her '*Biye Pagla Buro'* (An Old Man Greedy for Marriage), *Rachanavali,* pp. 502–7.
80. Rokeya S. Hossain, '*Ardhangi',* in *Rachanavali,* p. 11.
81. Cited in Anisuzzaman, *Muslim Manas,* p. 377.
82. Cited in Wakil Ahmed, *Unish Shatake,* vol. 2, p. 10.
83. Cited in Morshed Shafiul Hasan, *Begum Rokeya,* pp. 39–40.
84. Cited in Abdul Qadir, 'Intro', in *Rachanavali,* pp. 13 & 17.
85. Quoted from Suzie Tharu and K. Lalitha (eds.), *Women Writing in India,* New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991, vol.1, p. 152.
86. In the context of Hindu social reform, it can be said that that although men like Rammohan Roy or Vidyasagar or Vivekananda dedicated themselves to the cause of educating women and upgrading their life-situations out of genuine idealism and concern, the middle class was with them from a desire to make their private life conform to their public and professional life. The aim of the reform movement was not to make women independent or equal partners of men in the family or public life. It was rather to make them better equipped to fulfil their conventional roles as wives and mothers in the colonial setting. Contemporary didactic literature is full of advice to women, asking them to be a competent housewife, an intelligent companion to husband and a good mother to sons. A most popular didactic treatise was Satish Chandra Chakravarty, *Lalana Suhrid* (A Friend of Women), Calcutta: Gurudas Chattopadhyay & Sons, 1911, one thousand copies of which were sold in a year and a half, a very large number by contemporary standard. The *summum bonum* of the advice was that women had to become educated and efficient to serve the family and husband. It may be of interest to know that *Lalana Suhrid* was later recommended by Muslim reformers as an ideal book for Muslim women. For a brief analysis, See Bharati Ray, 'Introduction' in Bharati Ray (ed.) *Nari O* Parivar: *Bamabodhini Patrika. 1863–1922,* Kolkata: Anada publishers, 2002, pp. 2–13.
87. Rokeya S. Hossain, '*Bangiya Nari Shiksha',* in *Rachanavali,* p. 258.
88. Abdul Mannan Syed, *Begum Rokeya,* p. 48.
89. Shamsunnahar Mahmud, *Rokeya Jiboni,* p. 68.
90. Motahar Hossain Sufi, *Begum Rokeya,* p. 1.
91. Maleka Begum, *Banglar Nari Andolan,* p. 85.

CHAPTER 18

Women and Music: The Case of North India*

Amlan Das Gupta

I. EARLY ACCOUNTS

Although a number of texts on the theory of music have survived in India from ancient and medieval times, there is relatively little that we can say about the nature and content of earlier performative techniques. In part this may be related to the general problem of imagining the cultural practices of pre-modern times. More particularly too, when compared to the stability of literary or visual artifacts, the survival of sound is evidently a far more tenuous business; it may at best be caught in verbal description, or its traces live through the transmission of musical forms. The project of constructing a history of Indian music is attended by special problems and difficulties, and one of the urgent tasks is to devise a suitable methodology, one which is sensitive to the particular problems of this field of study. The fact that no such approach seems to be readily available is perhaps the reason why music in fact *has* no 'history': it exists partly in the uncertainty of anecdotal memory, partly in its audible traces and partly in ideologized discourses. Cultural history has hitherto paid scant attention to music: the ubiquity of music in the social life of India is matched by a pervasive lack of interest in its history.

It comes as no surprise that there is an especial dearth of knowledge about women musicians. The focus of this essay is on women singers, and in particular practitioners of Hindustani classical music. The task is by no means well defined. There is at the outset a problem in deciding what falls in this domain of 'classical' music, for the term itself is of recent invention and its content has been variously constituted. Again, no distinction seems to be evident between singers and dancers in the case of women. Many of the great women singers of the past were skilled dancers, and the traditional craft of the tawayef included dancing as one of its essential elements. In fact, one of the evident differences between female and male artists is that the musical profession is itself differently designated: whereas in the case of men it consists of skill in singing various classes of songs and playing instruments, in the case of women there is the additional elements of dancing, the arts of courtesy and sexual gratification. Termed variously bais, baijis and tawayefs, one often finds them uneasily situated at the fringes of the musical world. If the advent of the so-called 'respectable' women into the world of music led to this stereotype being questioned, even this change, as many performing artists today will testify to, has not been a smooth one.

The present essay is concerned with the agency of women in the world of North Indian, or Hindustani, vocal classical music. We will attempt to comment briefly on the early accounts of women performers, and then move on to a discussion of professional women singers. A large part of the study is devoted to assessing the role that women play in connection with the institutional loci of musical performance and dissemination: the radio, the recording companies, the gharana and so on. It should be obvious that the scope of this study is severely limited: the issues dealt with are capable of sustaining much more extended discussion, and important issues have been left untreated. Women instrumental performers, for instance, are not discussed at all.[1] The focus is, as far as practicable, on women as performers of a definite kind or set of musical forms and styles, and thus not merely on lifestyle, a subject which has received some attention in recent times. The period surveyed is roughly between the middle of the 19th century to the early decades after independence, though the first half of the 20th century naturally calls for more extended treatment. The turn of the century (1900) is taken as an important conjunctural point as is the moment of national independence.

One needs to clarify the implication of 'classical' music in connection with women, for the meaning is by no means fixed, even in common usage. One would I think generally speak of Begum Akhtar as a 'classical' singer, even though her main strength, the ghazal, does not always fall within the received idea of 'classical' music.[2] As we shall see, the line between the 'high' classical forms, if one may use such a term, and forms with local, seasonal or ethnic associations is continually blurred in speaking about women artists. Whereas men's virtuosity in vocal music is measured in respect principally of the dhrupad and the khayal (and allied forms, for instance, the sadra and the tarana), the repertoire of women artists, while it certainly includes the khayal, and in a few instances the dhrupad, is mainly thought to consist of the thumri and forms like dadra, kajri, chaiti and so on. The notion of a distinct domain of the classical is itself new, and the problem of using it is reflected in the use of terms such as 'semi'- or 'light'-classical to describe many of the forms that women artists were thought to specialize in. Questions of origins of musical styles have figured greatly in Indian musicology, but it seems likely now that even forms like the khayal and the dhrupad should not be seen as having uncomplicated lineages and heroic pioneers. It is widely agreed now that the forms of North Indian classical music underwent continual change and development. In the troubled course of its evolution, Indian classical music had developed infinite particularizations within its discrete and distinct forms like the dhrupad, the khayal, the thumri and so on. Some were old and some new: some in decline, others in assertive growth. Some of the forms that we encounter in ancient texts are now entirely unrepresented: others appear to be tantalizingly different from the way that we are accustomed to think about them. Some were accepted and sung across the breadth of the country, others were associated with particular schools, teachers and singers. A synchronic view of an important conjunctural point, the beginning of the twentieth century, would reveal them in various states of growth and decay: for instance, the dhrupad, whose passing is a familiar theme in contemporary discourses of classicity, is even at this time under pressure from the khayal, and this contestatory relationship is the subject of quite a few oral narratives

– which typically in the case of North Indian classical music, are structured in the shape of anecdotes. The transition from *desi* to *margi* – if such a simple formulation is at all meaningful – could have occurred only by trial and error, having false starts and uncertain routes of progress. In general, however, it may be right to claim that the growth of the notion of a unitary domain of the classical was accompanied by a gradual erasure of local and ethnic traces.

Whereas the development of the dhrupad and the khayal was associated with places like Gwalior and Delhi, the traditional association of thumri is with Lucknow. It is here, that in the wake of the decline of Mughal power, a sophisticated musical culture grew which accorded important place to the arts of thumri singing and dance, areas in which women played a large part. The art of thumri singing passed from Lucknow with the decline of the Avadh principate and found new homes in various parts of the country. The most significant growth of the thumri from the second half of the 19th century took place in Banaras, and it is likely that in the same way that a migration of kathak and tabla styles from Lucknow to Banaras took place, the thumri also entered into the already rich cultural life of this city. Peter Manuel traces a line of development from the (presumably) folk-oriented forms practised by women singers in the Mughal period, through the development and flowering of the bandish thumri in Lucknow, to the bol-banao thumri associated with Banaras.[3] Manuel concludes that the bol-banao thumri reached its maturity only after the 1920s. Even though the actual process may be considerably more complex than Manuel's analysis suggests,[4] it is clear that the content and style of thumri singing changed considerably since the development of the form in Lucknow and its environs.

The status of music and of musicians is also an important issue. In the period spanning the second half of the 19th and the early 20th centuries the domain of music was radically transformed, giving rise at the end of the period to the image of Shastriya – classical – music that we are familiar with. But our knowledge of the earlier phases is necessarily more fragmentary. A complete reconstruction is beyond the interest of this essay, but a few important features could be easily conjectured. One should start perhaps with the physical experience of displacement. The progressive decay of the North Indian centres of patronage (say, from about the early 19th century onwards) caused traditional (largely male) practitioners of music to leave their places of residence where they had ancestral homes and even land holdings to seek employment in other places.[5] It should be kept in mind that in many cases musicians were exchanging one place of profession for another, and so this movement should not always be construed as a loss of birthplace. In general one speaks of a movement westward and southward, to the 'Dakkhan', which could mean any place from Madhya Pradesh to Mysore. Others sought employment in metropolises like Calcutta and Bombay, where mercantile trade and proximity to the seat of political power had created an assorted class of patrons.

Both men and women musicians were affected by this process of dispersal. The growth of the 'gharanas', will be studied later, and it suffices to say here that a number of male artists made this change in a highly successful manner,[6] and were able to fashion a new system for the dissemination of music. In the case of women however we hear of the dispersal of communities of singers, as for instance in Lucknow. Other seats of courtly patronage too had large numbers of women singers. Banaras, the other great centre of thumri singing, however, is associated more with aristocratic patrons rather than for that provided by a single royal family. The process of dispersal is not well documented, and in many cases even when we know of singers, we see them for relatively brief periods in their lives. In most cases, the early periods in the lives of women singers are wholly undocumented: life-stories propagated by themselves or by others speak both of their origins within the class of tawayefs or bais, and entries into the singing profession from lower-middle class or artisanal backgrounds. The question of class is a vague one, at least till the 1920s. Tawayefs or bais are located at different social levels, from the aristocracy to the very poor, and singing skills seem to have existed at all levels. It should be said that skill in music seems to have been a way of betterment of opportunities, and exercising some sort of control over one's environment. There appears to be considerable social mobility at least for some singers, and they are said to have amassed large fortunes through singing, and achieved a measure of social prestige, if not respectability. A few allied themselves with members of the aristocracy or of other wealthy classes, though certainly in some instances the status of these alliances is by no means clear. Few were able to hold on to their fortunes however, and stories of impoverishment are common. Bad financial investments, exploitation by (usually male) associates, social ostracization and the enmity of wealthy patrons are recurrent motifs in the life stories of singers.[7] But in spite of dispersal, it seems that around the 19th century communities of women singers were situated in many towns of North India as well as in other parts of the country. The metropolis, with its demand for forms of pleasure and recreation, offered considerable scope for relocation, and many of the best known singers are associated with either Bombay or Calcutta.

Some musicians found royal or aristocratic support: others survived by teaching students and finding new forms of employment, like working in drama companies, music schools, or singing for the recording companies and somewhat later for the radio. Women singers however retained control over the kotha, which becomes a major site of musical performances, even for male singers. Considered as a musical institution (as opposed to its popular image as a site of sexual gratification), the kotha appears to have had a crucial role in the organization of music throughout the period under survey, though this is rarely highlighted in accounts of the lives of male musicians. Equally significantly, the kind of musical knowledge of which performing musicians had been traditional possessors comes increasingly under scrutiny. To put it simply, the question is one of *ownership*: the claim of traditional occupational groups to be the custodians of a particular kind of musical knowledge is strongly challenged. The opposition comes from diverse sources: British orientalist musicographers, educated middle-class music theorists, composers and anthologists are only a few of them. New aesthetic standards emerge, subtly influenced by western education, and new forms of pedagogy are devised. One sees thus the field of music itself in a state of change and transformation. Undoubtedly this is in itself nothing new, but from the point of view of the present study it assumes particular importance. Both the Muslim ustad and the women singer come under hostile scrutiny: if the ignorance and narrow-mindedness of traditional male singers is one constantly reiterated topic, the tawdriness and squalor associated with the woman singer is another. Individual accounts may in cases be sympathetic, in other cases not; but the music itself, one might say, undergoes a process of relocation. Speaking of Agra, Bhatkhande says: '[it] is a town which was dear to the heart of Emperor Akbar... Today the only music we hear there is that sung by the tawaifs and their sarangi players'.[8] It seems important to point out that the ustad and bai/tawayef both retain a trace of their North Indian origins even after their absorption in new contexts. Though some of the best known singers were native to Maharashtra, Karnataka and Goa on the one hand and Bengal on the other, and many more excelled at singing musical forms locally derived, ustads and bais both figure in the reinvention of Hindustani *reet ka gana* as Hindu shastriya *sangeet.*

The more fundamental problem which arises in the case of earlier women performers is of imagining pre-modern practices of music: what forms and styles did they specialize in? What kinds of training did they receive? Our knowledge about women performers dates from relatively recent times. If one were to start with the late 16th century, an important originary point in the construction of musical histories and the time from which major traditions are derived, one would find comparatively little evidence of individuated women performers, as there are men. Musical tradition designates the important occupational groups of the Dhadis and Mirasis, the line of distinction being that the Dhadis were later arrivals in India, while Mirasis were native to the country. In his autobiography Alladiya Khansahab describes the occupation of Mirasi women as that of singing 'during weddings and on other festive occasions'.[9] There is little doubt that the musical taste of the early Mughal court was a mixed one. Abul Fazl noted that Akbar paid 'much attention to music' and that there were numerous musicians at the court 'Hindu, Irani, Turanis, Kashmiris, both men and women'. The majority of them appear to be drawn from ethnic and professional communities of musicians, classed together with other kinds of entertainers like mummers and jugglers. But whereas some male musicians seem to have independent identities, the same cannot be said of women. Fazl's list of Akbar's musicians contains 36 names, but women artists are not mentioned.[10] At the same time, he gives names of classes of musical performers, both male and female. But performers of music cannot be separated from other professional entertainers. The *Ain-i-Akbari* (III.7) mentions different classes of women singers and instrumental artists, including the 'Hurkiyah' and 'Dafzan' singers and the Dhadi women who sing the 'Dhurpad and Sohla on occasions of nuptial and birthday festivities'.[11] There are also the 'Kanchanis' who sing and dance. Joep Bor points out that the term 'dancing girl' was used indiscriminately and dismissively by European travellers and recordists. He cites Peter Mundy (1632):

> There are also the dauncinge wenches, of whome there are divers sorts, as Lullenees, Harcanees, Kenchanees and Doomenees (all whoores though not in soe publique a manner) being of different Castes and use different manner of musick.

and Francisco Pelsaert , who resided in Agra between 1621 and 1627:

> There are many kinds of dancers, among them the Lolonis, who are descended from Persian whores who have come from Persia [to India] and sing only in Persian; and a second kind, Dommines, who sing Hindustani songs.[12]

Accounts of women performers are plentiful in later accounts of the Mughal period. Other groups that are mentioned include Ramjanis, Manganis, Khelonis and so on. The term *Bai* for Muslim dancing girls is apparently in use from the early Mughal period.[13] F. Buchanan, writing in Bhagalpur around 1810, says that Muslim dancing girls are called Bais, while the term Ramjani is used to designate similar women from Hindu backgrounds.[14] An oral tradition distinguishes between those women with the appellation Bai, who were exclusively singers, from those who used the title *Jan*, and were both singers and dancers.

These generic terms for different groups of performers are only a few that we encounter in the early modern period. Their specific differences may not always be clear to us at this distance, and there seems to be variance in the way these labels are applied and understood. It seems important to emphasize the fact that women performers are mostly designated as *classes*, conforming to ethnic or occupational groupings. It is true that a few names do figure in the records, mostly in connection with the kind of influence that such women wielded in courts and aristocratic circles. It is well known that Aurangzeb departed from his father's policy of patronizing music, but Manucci has an account interestingly enough of the 'superintendents' of the dancing girls, itself a long list, attached to the royal household.[15] We know for instance of Lal Kanwar in Jahandar Shah's court, or the singers Nurbai and Kamalbai in that of Mohammad Shah but these do little to alter this impression of generic classification.[16]

Both European observers and local recordists continue to document the musical culture of the late and post-Mughal period, and in it, the position of women entertainers. With the decay of the Delhi court the focus shifts elsewhere: to the kingdom of Avadh, to smaller principalities in North and Central India, as well as to the new urban centres of political power. We hear of Nickee Bai, 'the Catalani of Hindostan' in Calcutta, often present at entertainments given for Europeans. The streets of Faizabad were crowded with women entertainers: Abdul Halim 'Sharar' writes that Nawab Shuja-ud-doula was fond of such entertainments. 'He was by nature attracted to beautiful women' writes Sharar, 'and was fond of dancing and singing. For this reason there was such a multitude of bazaar beauties and dancers in the town that no lane or alley was without them'.[17] British hostility towards the Avadh rulers fed on their fondness for music and dance.[18] W.H. Sleeman, often described as being a sympathetic observer, has nothing but contempt for Wajid Ali Shah's musical inclinations:

> He spends all his time with the singers and the females they provide to amuse him, and is for seven and eight hours together living in the house of the chief singer Rajee-od Dowla – a fellow who was only lately beating a drum to a party of dancing-girls, on some four rupees a-month. The singers are all Domes, the lowest of the low castes of India...[19]

Bor notes that Indian and European observers present radically different perspectives on women artists: in the first kind they are described as prostitutes, their songs as obscene. He contrasts such views with the sympathetic assessment of writers like Mirza Jaffar Hussain and Mirza Mohammad Hadi Ruswa, who present a far more sensitive and nuanced view of the tawayef community in Lucknow. Other North Indian courts and aristocratic households maintained retinues of musicians. Maharaj Ramsingh II of Jaipur (1835–80) had no less than 44 women dancers and singers in his famous *gunijankhana*.[20] We also know of charismatic women artists in the courts of Gwalior and Ajaygadh. We find that accounts in which women performers play significant roles as individuals date only from the middle of the 19th century. Even here the majority of accounts have to do with the interaction between male and female performers. Accounts are more plentiful from the end of the 19th century onwards: this is also the time of the advent of the recording companies in India.

II. ORAL HISTORIES

The reliance of accounts of North Indian music on anecdote has always been one of its major problems. It is well known that the transactions of knowledge in the world of North Indian music has always been dependent on oral communication, and this practice has survived even in the face of rapid technological advance. Urmila Bhirdikar and I have recently argued for the need of devising a way of dealing with oral narratives and reading anecdotes.[21] Some preliminary observations may be made here. Musicians habitually recount anecdotes in the course of musical performances: anecdotes accompany musical instruction and discussion of the intricacies of bandish and nikas. Given that this is the most significant domain of shared knowledge among performers and listeners, it is obviously shortsighted to ignore it altogether as so many accounts have done: equally, there does not seem to be much point in trying to distinguish between anecdotes on the basis of a criterion of 'truth' or even of probability. It has seemed to us that the structure of the anecdote is what demands attention: the way in which musical knowledge can be transmitted from hearer to listener in the form of brief narratives: the limits are set equally by operation of memory in the musical community and the kind of expectation which is generated by the position of the subject in the ideological world of the narration. The circulation of information within the community is through such anecdotes: no radical distinction exists between personal experience and that of other raconteurs, which may be repeated and retold on appropriate occasions. At the same time the nature of the subject determines what in fact can be said, in the sense that the anecdote highlights a particular quality or characteristic and the circulation of the anecdote depends upon the acceptance of this. Anecdotes can be told equally of say Ghagge Khuda Baksh, in the late 18th century and Faiyaz Khan in the 20th; but it would be unusual to find one which, say, emphasized Abdul Karim's mastery over the lower octave, or for that matter Amir Khan's over the higher octave. The function of the anecdote in this sense is ideological, in that it makes a particular claim (or denies it) on behalf of its subject, be it a performer, style or school. Of course, anecdotes form part of other forms of oral knowledge current in musical circles (collections of compositions, technical points, gharana genealogies and so on), though anecdotes may figure importantly in the techniques of imparting such information. It remains to be emphasized again that anecdotes of male performers are far more plentiful than those of women, and in many cases the anecdotes move around the sharp splits and divisions between the worlds of male and female performers.

We are fortunate in possessing a first-hand account of the musical setting of Calcutta around the turn of the century in the writings of the well-known musicologist Amiyanath Sanyal. It appears that the women singers played a considerable part in the musical life of the metropolis around the turn of the century, hosting visiting musicians, above all serving to create a sophisticated and critical setting for the consumption of music. Principal among the artists named and described are Gauhar Jan and Malka Jan Agrawali[22] with both of whom the writer was well acquainted. But *Smritir Atale*, while it presents an unusually positive and sensitive view of the woman performer, also uses the repetitive trope of conflict between bai singers and male ustads. Sanyal's viewpoint is unusual, as he seems to have equal access to the houses of the bhadralok (he presents himself as a medical student and music enthusiast), the pleasure houses of the rich, residences of ustads and the kothas of bais. Many of the stories he recounts involve his teachers Badal Khan and Shamlal Kshetri who themselves were teachers and confidantes of many woman singers. He himself was on friendly and intimate terms with great women singers of his time like Malka Jan Agrawali, and describes the many occasions when he and his friends were able to persuade her to sing particular compositions just for them:

> When she came to our meetings we used to tease and cajole her, engage in flattery and banter to get her in to the right frame of mind. Then we would pester her with our demands - " sing the beginning of that thumri...", "sing the antara of that thumri...", "do sing it once...". "once again...", "just one more time...", "if you don't sing it it's you who'll regret it all your life, what do we care!", and countless other demands of this kind. Malka Jan Agrawali was mild and good-tempered and it wasn't difficult to get her to comply.[23]

But deep in the text of both *Smritir Atale* and the lesser known *Gurujir Baithake* there are indications of the tensions inherent in the musical world described in the book. The relationship between the male ustad and the successful woman singer was by no means without strain. Both the accounts of Moujuddin's animosity towards women performers and Faiyaz Khan's encounter with Gauhar Jan, serve ultimately to present a view of the superiority of male singers both in terms of skill and innovativeness and of traditional knowledge.[24]

On the whole, however, anecdotes of women performers are comparatively poorly recorded. As till about the second decade of the 20th century women artists did not figure in the histories of the gharanas, or principal styles and schools of music, the reconstruction of gharana histories have little information about women performers. What we do know is often in the context of their dealings with male artists, and in them women tend to come out as inferior. We have little authenticated information about the lives of women performers, their practices of training and performance, their performance practices and so on. There seems to be little doubt that the social organization of women musicians till fairly recently (i.e. mid 20th century) was essentially distinct from that of male artists. Reba Muhury's account entitled *Thumri o Baiji* contains valuable information about the daily lives of women artists.[25] In fact, as contrasted to the patriarchal structure of the male singing tradition, the organization of the community of women artists was essentially matrilineal or gynocratic: male children for instance were not desired, and female offsprings were highly prized. Male members of the community would usually serve subsidiary roles like servants or attendants; if they were lucky and received some training in music they could at best hope to be accompanists. There were undoubtedly exceptions to this general rule: for instance, those born of noble or aristocratic patrons could hope for better chances, the great example being Bhaiyyasaheb Ganpatrao of Gwalior. Muhury points that in spite of the image of a luxurious lifestyle and conspicuous consumption associated with the life of the tawayef, such fortune was reserved for a very few, and that also for short periods. In fact the average bai or tawayef lived a life of extreme simplicity, even plainness. Muhury notes that they were mostly held in contempt and distrust by respectable householders.

> When baijis went out they covered a major portion of their heads. They dressed modestly, carefully covering their bodies. The cover on their heads was prompted by no other reason save the fact that it is a common custom among women in Uttar Pradesh and elsewhere. Just as visiting a temple bareheaded constitutes a dishonour to the deities, so too it is disrespectful to go before someone with the head uncovered. But there were many who looked down upon this practice and made fun of it. Their insinuation was, what need does a baiji have for a cover on her head? There was an additional motive behind this practice. Baijis covered their head to prevent easy identification. Recognition brought scorn and ridicule, this was a problem for them.[26]

Similarly the religious practices of baijis invited scathing contempt. Muhury points out that while there is a fair amount of writing on middle-class attitudes towards professional entertainers, the reverse is poorly documented. She notes that in her experience these women spoke tenderly and with affection of their clientele in spite of the fact that they often lived in fear of persecution and even bodily harm.

> They were always apprehensive that society would object to whatever baijis did. A nameless dread held them in their grip. There was cause enough for this, as on the flimsiest pretexts they had to suffer terrible torture. ... The fact is that while the rich extended their patronage to baijis, they also fell into the habit of regarding them as commodities.[27]

The life-stories of Janki Bai (known as 'Chappanchhuri' as her face was defaced by knife cuts at the behest of a wealthy patron) and Badi Moti Bai, whom Muhury found in a state of utter penury, living next to a cowshed, support Muhury's assertion about the tenuous status of the women performer and her subjection to the whims of her patrons. In fact, such stories could be infinitely multiplied. Most women performers who amassed large fortunes in their lifetimes, lost them quickly too. There is the account of the most famous of them all, Bai Gauhar Jan, reduced in the autumn of her life to selling compositions to students for a rupee each: much later there is Sundarabai Punewali, who at one time rented the top two floors of a hotel for her personal use, but lost all her money after being induced (by male associates) to invest in a bogus record company.[28] Stories of mental disease, as a result of impoverization and family problems are often recorded. Muhury recounts the sad history of Bai Durgeshnandini, reduced by a personal tragedy to near-destitution and mental illness. Many women singers apparently turned to religion at the end of their singing careers, but here too the reception was by no means unequivocal. A particular religious institution in Maharashtra accepted no less than 22 singers but only on the condition – intolerable as it may seem – that they gave up singing altogether.[29] Communities of women performers appear to have existed in all major towns in Northern India, and also in

Maharashtra, in the early 20th century: these place names often make it possible to identify them definitely. The community as a whole had a leader or head, the chaudhurain, who arbitrated in disputes and commanded a good deal of respect. There is a tantalizing mention of a performance by a 'Chaudhuran Bai' in Calcutta, who danced dhamar to the accompaniment of Khalifa Abid Husain of Lucknow. When movements were afoot to ban 'nautch' girls in Lucknow, there was a protest meeting of tawayefs at the residence of Nanhua and Bachua, the chaudhurains of the tawayef community there, and students of the legendary kathak maestro Bindadin Maharaj. There is also evidence of migration, undoubtedly caused by the exigencies of patronage: Zohrabai Agrewali is referred to as 'Patnewali',[30] as she lived in Patna for a long time and was patronized by the zamindars of Ramgarh and Gidhaur. From the mid 19th century Calcutta was home to a very large community of singers. Many of these women had migrated here from the north, and were patronized both by Bengali middle-class and aristocratic patrons, and by members of the non-Bengali business community. One of the principal figures in the musical world of Calcutta around the turn of the century was Seth Dulichand (or Dunichand), a wealthy businessman, who invited major gharanedar ustads to visit and even reside in the city. Moujuddin Khan was often his guest: Alladiya Khan refused to settle down in Calcutta but often visited the city and taught Tarabai (who is variously referred to as Dulichand's wife and his employee) who apparently did not perform in public. More successful was his attempt to secure the services of Khalifa Badal Khan of Panipat (or Sonepat), the well-known sarangi player, as a tutor for Tarabai. Badal Khan oversaw the flowering of khayal in Bengal. Among his students were Bhismadev Chattopadhyaya and Girijasankar Chakravorty, but eminent women singers like Malkajan Agrewali also took *talim* from him. Around the same time in Bombay we know of Baputara, a singer from Goa (described by B.R. Deodhar as reigning queen of musicians[31]) who had a house in Kalbadevi, which was patronized by the most eminent musicians of the city.[32] It was at her house that the memorable concert at which Bablibai, a disciple of Natthan Khan of Agra sang raag Lalat, and after her Alladiya Khan, newly arrived in the city, was persuaded to give his first recital in the city.[33]

The economy of the kotha was by all accounts an interesting one. Many performers may have been – even if for relatively short times – prolific earners, but they supported large entourages.[34] The number of women members supported is difficult to generalize, but it would probably include older women unable to perform, and young girls still learning music (and dance). Among the male members of the community were the sarangi (and harmonium) players, tabla players, music teachers and in some cases at least, gharanedaar ustads, who apparently trained women in voice technique and compositions. Questions as to the source and content of their talim or repertoire are difficult to answer: The sarangi player Siyaji Maharaj (Mishra) is often mentioned as the teacher of a number of members of this family, though women thumri singers must have learnt the larger part of the vast repertoire of thumris, kajris, chaitis and so on from other women singers either in their family or those they held in a position of regard. This would in part account for the fact that the repertoire of women singers of the purab tradition shows remarkable similarity no matter where these women were located. That women singers thought themselves as forming a kind of community is attested to, as for instance by Alladiya Khan's account of his visit to the marriage of Durgabai Agrewali's daughter:

> The marriage of the daughter of Durgabai Agrewali was being performed with great ceremony. All the tawayafs of the purab style, as also those from other cities, had come there. A great concert was being held. Many thousands of people, local and from other places, were present. There was such a crowd that the music could not be heard properly. There was commotion and merriment everywhere. Then Chhoti Nanni Jodhpurwali was put up to sing. She sang so well that a hush fell over the whole gathering. Everybody was silent. Chhoti Nanni sang with such effectiveness that she made everybody cry. The concert went on for three evenings and three nights. After that whenever there was disturbance in the gathering, Chhoti Nanni was made to sing! This is how popular she became with the people of the place. This was really a great and magnificent occasion.[35]

A typical view may be that provided by Mohammad Jan, a sarangi player:

> Baijis learned mainly from sarangi players. I would visit their houses three or four times a week, in the morning. Other musicians went daily to practise with them. If they were rich and wished to expand their knowledge, they would spend a lot of money to receive training from different masters, most often reputable artists who came to their homes to teach them....
>
> The audience consisted only of men, and then only those who could offer a certain amount of money, depending on how pleased they were. Some gave a hundred rupees, others fifty or twenty-five. The rate for musicians, two sarangi players and one tabla player was fixed at 37.5%, which they divided among themselves.[36]

Mohammad Jan speaks of the decay of this community of singers in the 1950s. Munirbai of Lucknow, herself a reputed dancer and student of the kathak dancer Shambhu Maharaj, attributed the final breakup of the tawayef community to three principal causes: Gandhiji, independence and the Arya Samaj!

> The Arya Samajis were always against us. They said we were a corrupting influence and deserved no place in civilized society. In fact it was largely the Arya Samaj campaign that was responsible for the concerted police drive against the kothewalis of Lucknow in December 1958.[37]

Munirbai's testimony locates a major point of disjuncture in the history of women performers in India. This moment however was long in coming and for an understanding of the processes of change we would be required to examine the repositioning of musical knowledge in modern India. Vidya Rao points out that the tawayef 'does not exist any more', and the notion of one has been identified with the prostitute. This identification has been strengthened by the popular cinema, as also by the fact that the few tawayefs who still practise their art are forced to live in the red-light districts in cities because of social pressures.[38]

III. GRAMOPHONE ARTISTS

A way of approaching the changes in the status of women singers is through the gramophone industry, active in India from around the beginning of the 20th century.[39] It is difficult to overestimate the importance of the advent of sound recording in the history of music in India, and in particular to our assessment of women as musical performers. On 8 November 1902, F.W. Gaisberg, a recording engineer associated with the Gramophone Company, recorded songs by two 'dancing girls' associated with the Classic Theatre in Calcutta named Soshi Mukhi and Fani Bala. Gaisberg was not particularly impressed by their singing: 'two little nautch girls aged fourteen and sixteen with miserable voices',[40] is how he describes them. Yet these must go down in history as the first recordings of Indian artists in India under the Gramophone Company label, a name that was to become highly influential in the history of recording in India. This was not however the first time Indian artists had been recorded under this label. Three years before this a total of 44 recordings – largely of recitations and readings – had been made in London on 7" discs. In fact, by the turn of the century, blank gramophone cylinders and discs, as well as phonographic equipment, had become available in India through the efforts of both Indian and European entrepreneurs, allowing people to record their own voices as well as those of friends or relations. The first decade of the new century saw the establishment of a thriving industry, with a large number of companies engaged in selling commercially produced records, both in disc and cylinder format. Between 1899 and 1914 there were no less than 12 companies operating in India, and at least 26 label brands can be identified.

Much of this information is to be found conveniently in Michael Kinnear's excellent work on the early history of recording in India (the first volume appeared from Popular Prakashan, Bombay in 1994; the second from Bajakhana, Victoria in 2000). The most substantial contribution of the work is the exhaustive documentation of the recordings made in India by the Gramophone Company in the period 1902–1910. This needs to be supplemented with the work on early recording regularly published in *The Record News*, the journal of the Society of Indian Record Collectors, Mumbai. This (now fairly large) body of work allows us to view the beginnings of mechanical reproduction in the field of Indian classical music with greater clarity than before. Particularly for the purpose of this study, it affords striking evidence about the participation of women in the early phases of recording, thereby enabling us to understand better the position of women in North Indian (Hindustani) classical music. It should be said, however, that the knowledge of recorded music in India is still very fragmentary. The survivals, for instance of shellac discs – though considerable – are far from being complete. Nor are the catalogues or lists easy to come across. The greatest problem seems to be that in spite of heroic individual efforts by collectors, no single, publicly accessible archive of importance exists in this country. As we have seen, that the turn of the century was a time of many changes in Indian classical music and the practices of music are seen in a state of fluidity and instability. One reason was the changes in the forms of patronage and consumption; the incursion of new technology certainly played its part. Among the most obvious effects of recording, one was to alter radically the patterns of circulation and dissemination of music. Now purchasable as a commodity, music associated with definite and specially value laden social loci – like the durbar, the mehfil, the kotha, the theatre – can be transferred into the confines of domestic privacy, and acquires the near-miraculous power of reproducibility, thus crossing the boundary of what Jacques Attali has called the domain of *representation* to that of *repetition*.[41]

On the 11th of November, 1902, Gaisberg recorded the most important of his artists: Bai Gauhar Jan. This is clearly a moment of great importance in the history of Indian music.

Gauhar made quite an impression on the recordists, and in a memoir published in 1918 by W.C. Gaisberg (F.W. Gaisberg's brother and successor as recording engineer for the Gramophone Company), she is described as being 'a great artist' who was 'really delightful and intelligent'.[12] Her records sold particularly well and were popular throughout the country (evidently not the case with other artists, who enjoyed local popularity). But perhaps there is a musical point to be made as well: that presumably for the first time in history were the different kinds of traditional musical compositions being sung in a particular timed format, corresponding to the limits of the discs: time, held firmly as *laya, jati, chhanda* and *matra* within the musical composition itself becomes the determining force in the outer form of the recording, raising new questions about selection and combination, form and structure. The new determinacy enables new approaches to style.

The 'first' recording tour (1902), which we have been talking about, was limited to Calcutta. Apart from Gauhar Jan and Lalchand Boral, Gaisberg seems to have depended largely on artists of the Parsi and Bengali stage, especially those attached to the Classic and Corinthian theatres. It must be thought that European companies, in general, had something of a disadvantage in this direction, for Indian companies, or those with Indian collaborators, could claim a much more intimate knowledge of the local musical scene. But in subsequent recording expeditions, the Gramophone Company managed to work out an extensive network of local contacts, as well as making recordings in different urban centres. The volume of recordings also shows sharp increases. From a total of 553 recordings made in 1902, we have 1274 in 1904-1905 and 1402 in 1906–1907.

From the beginning of recording in India, the field appears to have attracted a large number of women artists. This is clear in all three of Kinnear's sets of lists; this is also borne out by later catalogues. The voices of these women still speak out to us eloquently, requiring us to imagine their historical contexts. Much of the music is of a high quality, but this appreciation needs to be guarded against unthinking romanticization. The question that presents itself is as to why so many women should have been recorded in the early phases of recording and what bearing this has on the status of musical knowledge. It may be advisable to start with a closer look at some of the evidence. In the 1902 lot there are something like thirty male artists (including all categories – recitations, religious texts, etc) and fifteen (or 16) women. Of the total of 553 recordings about 230 are either solely or jointly by women. For the stricter classical pieces, we have only Gauhar and Lal Chand Boral (5 each incl. 7" and 10"). The 7" g suffix series of 1904–1905 includes Carnatic music, and so is difficult to assess: but the ratio has certainly gone up in favour of women. Of the 22 classical (khayal-dhrupad-tarana) pieces 11 are sung by a number of women artists, whereas the bulk of the male recordings are of the redoubtable Abdul Karim Khan, at this time still serving at the court of the Gaikwad in Baroda. The 10" sequence shows a number of additional male singers. In the next series (1906–1907) the female presence is even stronger.

Thus splits along gender lines are visible in the lists, with the musical forms ideologized as being 'higher' falling in the male domain and being contained within the inherently patriarchal construction of the idea of gharana; the so-called sub-classical forms being the field of professional woman artists. The authorizing locus of knowledge is the male gharanedar ustad ideally working under conditions of courtly or aristocratic patronage, from whom other male students learn through a kind of economy of gift, in which the returns for the gift of knowledge are conceptualized in terms of service and fidelity. In practice this was not always how things worked, and that competing systems for the dissemination of musical knowledge is something that could be studied through the examples of women artists. Early lists of recordings show unusually large number of women artists entering into the field of recording. Forms of music practised by women are therefore recorded in large numbers. From a total statistical analysis it would appear that the number of recordings in the early lists is inversely proportional to its place in the imaginary hierarchy of musical forms. Thus there are the fewest dhrupads and the greatest numbers of geets, ghazals, dadras and kajris, with khayals and thumris lying somewhere in between. But the opportunity afforded by the neutral space of recording is used by singers to create images of the self which run counter to the general run of musical practices. Let me introduce this point with a glance at the lists.

In the course of the Gramophone Company's recording tour of 1906-1907, William Gaisberg and George Dillnutt recorded the songs of Miss Oomda Jan, a well known singer of Hyderabad. She appears to have made a favourable impression on the organizers. She recorded 14 songs, a number which appears to be high without being excessive; in the same tour 20 songs of Jankibai of Allahabad were recorded. What distinguishes Oomda Jan's efforts is that she appears to have recorded songs of many different types: 3 dhrupads, 3 khayals, a sargam-geet, a tappa, in addition to horis, thumris and a gazal. Given that at this time social distinctions reinforce formal distinctions in the musical world, this freedom to negotiate genres appears to be of significance. *Recorded* repertoires often run counter to the content of performances or even the status of musical knowledge. Women singers, we know, often began concerts with a short khayal composition or two; or if they were also skilled in dancing, as Gauhar Jan reputedly was, they rendered a tarana while dancing. All these were designed to evoke admiration for virtuosity; but there was no doubting that the main content of their concerts in most cases was a range of sub-classical forms. In Oomda Jan's case – and in many others too – the space afforded by recording becomes a way of recasting musical identities. On the other hand, the popularity of light classical forms as items of recorded music, prompts male ustads to strive for competence in these as well: many of the male singers in the early lists record them side by side other kinds.

When the record companies appear on the scene, male singers of classical music, particularly those hierarchized in the gharana system, seem hesitant to enter into its domain. On the other hand, women artists make remarkable use of its potential, creating often new images of themselves. Women artists also often record vast numbers of songs. Gauhar Jan is reputed to have recorded near about 600 songs: the survivals of Janki Bai Chhappanchhuri, Gauhar's greatest rival, are also very considerable. The range of forms is also of great interest, for women record in all the varieties of classical and sub-classical music: dhrupad, dhamar, sadra, khayal, chaturang, tarana, sargam-geet, as also thumri, dadra and its innumerable varieties now largely forgotten: like sohar, bandra, ghato, chaiti, savan, jhoola. Also represented are ghazals and geets, various kinds of devotional music, including in rare cases qawalis (Bai Banni Jan of Meerut recorded the famous Amir Khusrau composition '*Chhap tilak sab chhinire*').

Thus one of the immediate effects of early recording in India was to alter perceptions of ability, repertoire and virtuosity. But if, in the short run, the general tendency is towards variety, the superimposition of new possibilities on a field already replete with different kinds of highly individuated practices, the more extended effects are of another order altogether. I can only point to some of them here. Recording operates as a form of disclosure, pushing forms of knowledge held privately, or in specific occupational groups *eis to meson*, into the middle, for public consumption. As such it is one of the earliest examples of the institutionalization of music, one which serves to create new norms of taste and receptivity. 'All internal and external relations' writes Pierre Bourdieu '...that agents of production, reproduction and diffusion manage to establish are mediated by the structure of relations between the instances or institutions claiming to exercise a specifically cultural authority. In a given space of time a hierarchy of relations is established between the different domains, the works and the agents having a varying amount of legitimizing authority'.[43] One is aware of course that here recording takes its place with other forces and developments: the emergence of the concert stage as a musical forum, the growth of new forms of classification and pedagogy, as for instance that associated with the name of V.N. Bhatkhande, the establishment of the All India Radio, and so on to the newer developments in the technology of musical reproduction and dissemination. One would then also have to talk about the effects of the decline of patronage and the strategies of survival that classical music has to adopt.

A further point needs to be made. Male recordists are seen offering a greater variety of kinds in the absolute sense (i.e instrumental music, parodies, animal imitations, religious, recitations), whereas women when not singing theatre songs, are seen exclusively as singers of a variety of classical and sub-classical forms. Thus when the question of recording is narrowed down to these, women artists seem to acquire even greater importance. For Will Gaisberg there was no doubt in fact that woman artists were the most appreciated: 'the male artists are not great favourites and their part generally consists of teaching the girl singers their songs and making up the orchestral accompaniment'. The only truly popular male artist he knew was Peara Saheb, and he had a voice like a woman's![44]

This may also be a way of countering the totalizing discourse of gharana and *guru-shishya paramapara* that we have become inured to. The great diversity of musical practices – both those of men and those of women – that is described in the lists of recordings largely exists outside the valorization of gharana music. The only male artists that Will Gaisberg could see were those that formed part of the woman singer's entourage. One of the most important facts to be noted is that women artists are identified by their place of residence, whereas the important male ustads are generally known by their gharana labels. In most cases, the women artists belong to urban centres, or market towns. There is ample evidence that women artists lived in communities which acted as relatively stable points on a map of music that was rapidly changing with the centres of male patronage decaying, and the performers themselves forced to make long journeys for alternative employment, or even to supplement their incomes. As professional performers they had regular incomes – in some cases, very substantial incomes, so that Janki Bai refused an offer of Rs 5000 from Beka Record A.G. and The International Talking Machine Company m.b.h. to sign an exclusive contract. Between 1908 and 1910 the Gramophone Company alone sold nearly 23,000 copies of her discs.[45] The extent to which women artists – the much reviled professional community of women singers – supported and subsidized the economy of music is poorly documented. It is known that Janki Bai paid her ustad, Hassu Khan, the sum of Rs 2000 a month:[46] Akhtari Bai learnt from Abdul Wahid of Kirana, as Kesarbai did under Alladiya Khansahab. Other bais are known to have supported their ustads. That they afforded hospitality to ustads on long visits, and provided for their needs, is well known, and this practice was common at least till the 1970s. Yet it is equally clear that this economic support did not in any way improve the position of women in the hierarchy of music.

Women also learnt in at least two other ways, though they may have used their gharanedar ustads' names for the purpose of publicity. First of all, women artists learnt the great part of their repertoires (of sub-classical forms) from other women singers. These songs seem to exclusively exist in the feminine domain: their striking presence in the repertoires of women artists widely separated in time and place is a subject worth the closest study. Secondly, as Gaisberg noted, they learnt from sarangi players whom they often employed on a permanent basis. The fact that they were accustomed to thinking of musical knowledge as lying in the field of economic exchange, both of reception and consumption, may go a long way to explain their willingness to enter into the arena of recording, which they consider as another means of marketing their music. Existing always on the fringes of the musical world, women artists appear to have used their musical knowledge as a way of gaining a measure of economic freedom. Even when successful, their prosperity in most cases lasted only as long as they were able to sing. This immediacy, even materiality, in the view of musical knowledge is reflected in their facility in the world of gramophone records. A more polemical point could also be made here: the common association of technology and masculinity clearly does not work here. Male reluctance could not have stemmed purely from aesthetic reasons such as the inadequacy of time, the vulgarization of music and so on. As a number of oral records indicate, the fear of losing control over one's musical knowledge was strong among male ustads.

Women seem to have fewer qualms. Early recording was often – critically – thought to be excessively dominated by women artists. To make another polemical point, in the early phase of recording men imitate the tonal quality and pitch of women while recording. The aesthetics of feminine voice set the norms of taste in the field. It is well known – and often commented on – that male recording artists sang at unnaturally high pitches: it is likely that the success of women artists both in respect of reach and fidelity affected this decision. But the survival and success of the recording industry saw in time the gradual entry of male artists in large number. It is difficult to discern a specific point of time when this happened, but it is caused by the increasingly tenuous forms of patronage as much as the growing awareness of the advantages of recording. By the end of the first decade of the century, two eminent gharanedar ustads had recorded for the Gramophone Company: Muzaffar Khan of the Sikandrabad gharana, and Inayat Husain Khan of Sahaswan. In the following decades the culture of recording changed considerably. The names of eminent ustads like Bibe Khan of Lahore, Banda Husain of Saharanpur and Nisar Husain of Sahaswan feature in the 1940 Gramophone Company catalogue, so do those of a new generation of singers like Mallikarjun Mansur and Basavraj Rajguru. In time the field of recorded music became more strongly dominated by male artists, who came to set a new set of norms of taste in recorded music. The professional community of women artists became increasingly marginalized, and those who still commanded respect and popularity were in large part, those who can be placed within gharana confines: Hirabai Badodekar, Gangubai Hangal, Mogubai Kurdikar, Kesarbai

Kerkar. The recording industry, which acted in its earliest phases as a site of feminine virtuosity, gradually began to exert its own restrictive force. A tapering off is seen by the end of the first decade: in the 1906–1907 tour approximately thirty-five classical women singers were recorded by the Gramophone Company,[47] nearly thirty for the first time. Only eleven new singers were recruited in the 1908–1910 sessions, and twelve from the lot of 1906–1907 were given new contracts. It seems true that some new classical singers were recruited at every stage till about the 1940s, but these contracts were based in some cases on popularity in other fields, as for instance the stage (and later film). It should be pointed out that the total volume of recorded music continued to grow in leaps and bounds.

One might conclude this section with a point about taste. Artists entering the field of recording found themselves facing a new kind of audience: one that could not be seen, and, therefore, one whose tastes could not be fully predicted. The fact that artists feel impelled to record in so many different varieties, may itself be attributed in some part to a kind of anxiety that performers face in confronting this realm of indeterminacy. But the very success and popularity of the recording industry, invests the act of recording with a new kind of importance. The greater the stakes in the field of recording, the greater the sense of unease, and the more pressing the need to isolate those forms which are most viable. Certain forms and styles of music appear to become, in the simplest sense, uneconomical. This point is clear, in fact, when we study the survivals of an artist like Janki Bai of Allahabad; she recorded principally (if not entirely) in a wide variety of light classical forms. While some of these forms are easily recognizable as being connected with forms popular in later times, a greater number seem to have disappeared without a trace from the repertoire of the classical artist. Forms like the soz and the marsiya are cases in point: a far more restricted notion of the realm of the 'classical' is seen to emerge. One is left to speculate about the construction of a notion of *taste*, now located in the unstable and unpredictable public world of consumption.

IV. MUSIC IN THE SCHOOLS: THE RADIO

As we know, the late 19th and early 20th centuries saw the establishment of a number of new institutional loci for the management and administration of music. Apart from the theatre, which employed a large number of women singers, and the radio, which from the 1930s afforded some scope of employment, the other sites seem to afford relatively little material for the study of women artists. We shall discuss the radio later, but not the theatre: the primary reason for not doing so is that the subject of contribution of women to theatre (and film) music calls for a whole article to itself.[48] A more narrow reason is that the theatre movement in India acted as a major influence on musical developments in regional languages, while the focus of this article is on the traditional forms of the Hindustani classical music. It should be admitted though that this distinction is often difficult to maintain: the theatre drew strongly on the competence of traditional exponents of classical music and the influence of the gramophone record both in making available traditional compositions and in turn popularizing theatre music requires close study.

Music schools and circles can be more cursorily treated, given the limited scope they afforded for women artists. Such organizations grew up in many cities, a result of urban middle class involvement in music. The gayan mandalis and sabhas were often headed by civil servants, lawyers, doctors and teachers; the Parsi Gayan Uttejak Mandali was where Bhatkhande – a lawyer by profession – imbibed his early taste for classical music. The Bharat Gayan Samaj was founded in 1911 by Nanasahab Jogalekar and Bhaskarbua Bakhale.[49] The two most important figures in the attempt to adapt North Indian classical music to a style of pedagogy that had entered India with western education were Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande and Vishnu Digambar Paluskar. The latter's Gandharva Mahavidyalay was first founded in Lahore in 1901, while the Marris College in 1926 was founded after the All-India music concert movement had got under way. Related to these efforts to impart musical education outside the gharana system is the project of publishing musical texts. Such works could be both theoretical and historical, and could also serve as aids for prospective singers. Women play a minor role in this effort as a whole, apart from the fact that women from 'respectable' families naturally found it easier to learn music from schools than from ustads or bais. The degrees and diplomas awarded by the schools and colleges were in fact taken into account in getting radio contracts and later in securing employment as music teachers in schools and other educational institutions. Exceptions were certainly there and in all directions. Many women continued to learn from ustads and bais. We shall later examine a case where a woman singer with both experience of the kotha and the theatre ends up late in life as the Vice-Principal of a music college run by bhadralok enthusiasts in Calcutta. Mention should be made here however of the abortive experiment by Bhatkhande to start a tawayef school (around 1925), where 'public' women would be given proper *talim*, and to use a popular phrase, reinducted into the mainstream. The school failed because there were apparently no takers, and only a couple of women showed up.

The radio of course offered certain kinds of opportunities for women singers. Disc recording remained a major constitutive force in North Indian music till its decline in the 1970s, in spite of the fact that with the advent of microgroove vinyl records, the number of recorded artists (in classical music) declined sharply. As long as these were the most readily available forms of recorded music,[50] they undoubtedly moulded public taste considerably. With the introduction of the cassette and its sweeping popularity, the market opened up considerably and the restrictive hold of the major recording companies considerably lessened. The circulation of privately recorded music was also increased considerably, so that both early (disc) recordings and concert/radio recordings are more widely available to listeners. Radio broadcasts started in the 1920s, but in the first few years were restricted by weak transmissions and limited reach. There is no doubt, as Amitabha Ghosh has observed, that in the first decade of radio broadcasting at least, the gramophone was a far more powerful instrument of musical dissemination.[51] The radio was always under state control, and in the initial phases there seems to have been some resistance in the British Indian government to introduce radio broadcasts in fear that they might be used to spread nationalist messages. British experts, on loan from the BBC, laid the law as to the length and duration of music broadcasts: but the experience of the gramophone record had already, as we seen, prepared artists for temporal constraints. Stronger views about the selection of artists were expressed by their Indian counterparts. The Keskar report prepared as late as the 1950s, placed the blame for the decay of music on North Indian Muslims, who 'had appropriated and distorted the ancient art, turning it into the secret craft of exclusive lineages': in Muslim hands music was no longer 'spiritual'; it had become 'erotic', the special preserve of 'dancing girls, prostitutes, and their circles of pimps'.[52]

There should be no surprise therefore that the AIR under the guidance of Vallabhbhai Patel and B.R Keskar made it a matter of policy that singers and musicians from 'courtesan culture' – anyone "whose private life was a public scandal" – should be debarred from performing on the radio. Women artists were sought to be recruited from music schools, or from "respectable" families. As a result the great bulk of women artists – who had kept, for instance, the gramophone industry going – were excluded from the radio. Nevertheless, this system of screening was far less effective than one would have expected. Partly this was due to the general lack of interest in classical music among radio administrators: more importantly, at the local level, programme executives and station directors made and followed their own policies, with apparently little central interference. As a result, a number of woman artists were recorded, and some of these recordings still exist: the relatively longer formats make them a valuable supplement to the extant body of sound recordings. In some cases, the radio seems to have acted as a means of subsistence: Reba Muhury notes that when she met Badi Moti Bai of Benaras, her *only* means of subsistence was radio payments.[53] Durgeshnandini Bai was recorded in Patna, and her songs were regularly broadcast. Other – often smaller – radio stations broadcast the music of women singers irrespective of the fact whether they came from "respectable" families or from tawayef or bai backgrounds.[54] Among better known artists, we find that there seems to be a forgetting of origins: Rasoolan Bai, Siddheswari Devi and Begum Akhtar were regular recording artists. Among the earliest performers of the prestigious National Programme of Music was Kesarbai Kerkar. Apparently she refused to perform for the radio subsequently because she thought the other artists chosen for this particular slot were not of her calibre! It would, I think, be more accurate to see this as an index of the popularity of woman artists and the popular demand for their music rather than a mark of special favour and generosity on the part of the administrators.

On the other hand this policy created a body of women classical artists who came from 'respectable' families and found in the radio – rather than on the concert stage – a forum for musical expression. The need to maintain a regular schedule of broadcasts made the radio spread its net fairly wide. Most of the artists who became well known had clear gharana affiliations and were known to have received *talim* from eminent male ustads. Radio itself became a way of generating a musical identity, and conferred a seal of quality on particular singers. Like all institutions it also generated its own system of patronage and groupism. Sheila Dhar has written entertainingly (and self-deprecatingly) of her own experiences as a radio singer, but evidently not all radio artists possessed either her musical ability or her capacity for incisive self-criticism.[55] The radio encouraged a kind of bland mediocrity, and more often than not, a bureaucratic insensitivity to musical values. Yet in spite of its limitations, the radio remained a major site of music till recently, and its archives, where they still exist, contain an immense treasure of music.

V. WOMEN GHARANA ARTISTS

The emergence of the women 'gharana' artist has to do both with the self-positioning of the performers, as well as the changes in the notion of the gharana. The term gharana, so often thought to be the basic organizing principle of Hindustani classical music, does not seem to have been exclusively used even as late as the second half of the 19th century. The terms *khandaan* or even *biradari* are also in evidence. There is no doubt however that the practices of North Indian music were always built around families and communities of kinship. Such families were loosely organized and often dispersed in places even in the 19th century. However, little factual detail is available. In the dhrupad musical style repertoire was however distinguished in terms of the vanis: the authentic control over the vanis was often loosely familial. By the middle of the 19th century the differences among these styles had been blurred through intermarriage and tutelage: it was apparently not unusual to find that there were different styles being represented within a fairly restricted family unit. The gradual adoption of khayal singing by singers from dhrupad-singing families, and their rapid displacement from their places of residence, gave a special urgency to the need for methods of identification: places of origin or even earlier sites of patronage became coded in the names of gharanas. Alladiya Khansahab claimed that he represented the Jaipur gharana, as both he and his teacher Jahangir Khan had been employed at the court of Jaipur in the third quarter of the 19th century. Abdul Karim Khan called his family the Kirana gharana, thus immortalizing the village in (present) Uttar Pradesh from which his family came. Many singers of the Agra and Atrauli gharanas permanently settled in the southern and western parts of the country. In most cases these performers had in the course of their performing careers only a tenuous link with the places after which their gharanas were named.

The idea of the 'gharana', literally family, becomes an essential device for asserting musical identities and a particular style of training. Paradoxically, the wide prevalence of the word gharana occurred at a time when members of traditional musical families were imparting their knowledge to non-familial disciples, a process that is marked especially strongly in Maharashtra. Thus the admission of middle-class male Maharashtrian disciples into the 'gharana' fold was a major transformation of the idea of the singer's 'family', from a structure of kinship and clientage to a symbolic network of tutelage ties. For non-familial singers, it marked the seal of legitimacy, the sign of connection with a traditional structure: for the trainers, it marked at least in part their acceptability within the new social conditions that they were confronting. The gharana therefore operated as a kind of franchise, allowing a singer to claim a recognized musical style. The gharana system itself requires a great deal of examination and analysis, but that is beyond the scope of this essay. What we are really concerned with is the second major transformation in the idea (the admission of non-familial male disciples being the first): the emergence of women artists with gharana affiliations.

As we have seen before, the practice of women artists learning from male ustads is quite old, and examples abound from the beginning of the 19th century. There is no doubt that thumri and related forms were considered to be the near-exclusive preserve of women singers: that they learnt occasional khayals and even dhrupads is recorded in anecdotal history. It seems likely that the traditional *talim* of women singers within the so-called tawayef tradition covered a wide variety of musical forms, in keeping with the demands made upon them as professional singers. As we have noted earlier the distinction between competence and usual repertoire is crucial: whatever their actual talim, it seems likely that as a class women singers were called upon to sing thumris and allied forms much more regularly.

Some women apparently achieved fame as khayal singers. In the mid 19th century, we come across the name of Gokhi Bai who apparently initially trained the famous khayaliyas from Lahore, Ali Baksh and Fateh Ali (popularly referred to as Aliya-Fattu) before they took talim from the most eminent male singers of their time, including Tandraz Khan (i.e., 'Tanras' Khan, the name by which Kutub Baksh of Delhi was known), Bade Mubarak Ali Khan, Haddu Khan and even the dhrupad singer Behram Khan. The name of Idan Bai is remembered in an anecdote about a contest between herself and Aliya-Fattu: apparently she acquitted herself with great distinction.[56] Gokhi Bai's daughter Bablibai, who received *talim* from Natthan Khan of Agra was highly respected as a khayal singer. Zohrabai Agrewali, reputedly a student of Ahmad Khan of Gwalior and Kallan Khan of Agra immortalized her voice on gramophone records as did Gauhar Jan of Calcutta. Around the beginning of the 20th century, we find more names of women singers – in many cases associated with individual male ustads – such as Tanibai Ghorpade of Kohapur, Lakshmibai Jadhav (of Baroda) and herself – more significantly, the redoubtable Kesarbai Kerkar and Mogubai Kurdikar. All these singers were trained by Alladiya Khan of Jaipur (and his brother Haidar Khan): around the same time we find the Kirana artists, Hirabai Badodekar and Saraswatibai Mane (later Rane), Roshanara Begum and Gangubai Hangal. Gangubai's daughter Krishna Hangal emerged as a fine singer: interestingly, she represents an exclusively female line of familial *talim*, having learnt entirely from her eminent mother.

A study of these artists reveals a number of significant points. It seems likely, first of all, that Alladiya Khan and Abdul Karim directly taught a number of khayal singers and shaped their identity as gharana artists. It may be hasty to think of them as being the only male singers to do so: our familiarity with many of the above-mentioned artists has also to do with their status as gramophone artists. Nevertheless when one considers the women khayal singers who dominated the last three quarters of the century, one finds that many of them owe allegiance to the Jaipur and Kirana gharanas. The second point worth noting is that the earlier lot of women singers who achieved renown as gharana artists are clearly located within the professional class of women performers: in fact, according to Govindrao Tembe, Alladiya Khan's arrival in Kolhapur was tied up with his becoming a teacher to Tanibai, daughter of a tawayef named Krishnabai Kolhapurin. Krishnabai's patron Bapusahab Kagalkar arranged for Alladiya's appointment as court singer in order that Tanibai could receive instruction from Alladiya.[57] It is probably true to say that many other women musicians were also from the tawayef class, but there is also a growing need to cast a new identity for the women artists, one that edited out the tawayef connections and in many cases replaced them by middle class familial backgrounds.

At the same time, middle class women were learning from ustads in Bombay and Calcutta. The Agra ustads for instance set up a residence in Bombay and by the 1930s were teaching a number of women students:[58] Alladiya himself taught Susheela Rani Patel and Leelabai Shirgaonkar. The willingness of ustads to include women among their students in a general way and admit them within the gharana fold is a new development. An earlier generation of women singers had not achieved this in spite of its getting comparable (if not superior) talim from equally well-reputed ustads. The change, we have tried to suggest was not just in the way women were positioning themselves, but also in the notion of the gharana as a symbolic quantity, a label that could be given to certain aspirants. The fact that women themselves were demanding these labels certainly attests to a new space for negotiation: something that both professional artists and middle class women were deploying. In the first case, these singers had potential (or status) as performing artists, and consequently, as independent financial agents: they were pressing for and apparently in some cases receiving gharana affiliations. In the case of the second lot, it is probably that the taste for sophisticated khayal music had already established itself among middle class listeners in commercial centres like Bombay and Calcutta (earlier in Bombay), and the popularity of "institutionalized" music – principally the gramophone industry and the theatre, but also the radio and music schools and circles of connoisseurs – played an important role in de-linking classical music from the image of the meretricious and sexually dangerous tawayef and making it acceptable within domestic circles. In most cases it seems that the middle class women artists learnt with their families' consent, and indeed, active support. Musical knowledge in the course of its appropriation by the middle class intelligentsia was domesticated and denuded of much of its potentially dangerous ethnic and occupational origins.

In this connection, a glance at the career of Jadumoni Dasi (c 1853–1918) may be revealing.[59] Jadumoni became well known late in her life as a dhrupad singer; a rare feat, as very few women seem to have specialized in this area. Another notable name of course is that of Asghari Bai of Tikamgarh, who since the 1980s has emerged as something as a national icon, "as a sort of unique, idiosyncratic cultural treasure".[60] Recognized by the national and state governments, she has won a number of awards and been presented on television and in state-sponsored concerts. To return to Jadumoni: her early history is very much like other Bengali singers and theatre artists. Her mother was apparently in domestic service in the Pathuriaghata Tagore family, and the young Jadumoni's musical talent led to her being apprenticed to the well-known dhrupad singer Guruprasad Mishra and later to Jagadish Mishra. She quickly achieved fame as a theatrical performer as well as a singer, and became immensely popular with Calcutta patrons. Apparently she lost her money and jewellery in a mishap, and many years later was re-discovered begging on the streets by the dramatist and theatre enthusiast Nagendranath Bandyopadhyay. In order to re-establish her in life, Nagendranath founded the 'Sangeet Parishad Vidyalay' and appointed Jadumoni its principal. She performed at a few concerts, and participated at a meeting organized in protest against Rabindranath Tagore's views on music expressed in "Sangeeter Mukti" (the freeing of music). The proceedings of this meeting have recently been reissued, and we find that Jadumoni performed a number of dhrupads in rare talas to prove the points made by the main speakers. At least one of her students achieved considerable fame: Satkari Malakar, who in turn taught the great khayal singer Tarapada Chakravarti. The two phases of Jadumoni's career: the first as a bai and theatre singer in the late 19th century, and then as an 'institutional' singer in the early 20th, traces an important line of change in the images of women artists.

What remains to be discussed is the emergence of women from traditional singing families as stage artists. This is a far less promising area of discussion because almost none of the women from traditional musical families became performers themselves: in many cases they are said to have learnt prodigious amounts from the men of their family, and anecdotes occasionally record their role in the *talim* of non familial disciples. However with rare exceptions like Smt Annapurna Devi (daughter of Acharya Alauddin Khansahab), very few women musicians from within the gharanas came on to the public stage. It is in this connection that the career of Hirabai Barodekar becomes especially important. The daughter of Tarabai Mane, Hirabai is widely believed to be the daughter and disciple of Abdul Karim (she also learnt from her uncle Abdul Wahid and brother Sureshbabu Mane), though this has only intermittently been acknowledged from her side. Sureshbabu Mane was himself a highly respected artist and the connection between him and Hirabai (and later Saraswatibai) was however emphasized. It may be that in fact there was little difference between the case of a singer like Kesarbai and that of Hirabai (Tarabai Mane, Hirabai's mother was herself a singer), but the difference in the social positioning of these artists was considerable. Part of the difference may have been caused by the fact that Hirabai was a successful theatre artist, and later (in 1943) even acted with Bal Gandharva in the immensely popular *Sangeet Saubhadra.* Her emergence as a concert artist was therefore located within a certain defined space of Marathi middle class culture.[61] Inasmuch as "kulin" identity is a matter of public perception and social acceptance rather than one of origins, Hirabai must be seen as a pioneer in many respects: her early performances caused considerable excitement and attracted conservative ire. Many other well-known Marathi women singers – who achieved fame as khayal singers either exclusively, or alongside other kinds of music like tappa, kajri, dadra and bhajan – came from the stage: Mogubai Kurdikar is among the most eminent of them, but there were others like Sundrabai Punewali, who also had connections with the film industry.

It remains a fact however that very few women artists from traditional singing 'khandaans' entered into the profession of singing: paradoxically, the gharana system excluded women family members, while it could include non-familial women performers from both tawayef and middle class (or aristocratic) backgrounds. Later women artists, who had parents who were performers, usually claimed the 'gharana' of parents' gurus (and thus successively in subsequent generations), as Kishori Amonkar, daughter of Mogubai Kurdikar, claimed Jaipur gharana lineage, as Padmavati Shaligram (Gokhale), niece of Alladiya Khan's student Pt. Govindbua Shaligram, is often called a Jaipur-Atrauli singer, though her style bears few marks of the distinctive gayaki of Alladiya Khan's style. In recent times, Meeta Pandit, a fourth generation descendant of Shankarrao Pandit, is performing regularly as a Gwalior gharana singer, and emphasizes her link with her illustrious family.

The history of "gharana" music is thus substantially the story of the passing of music from family control into non-familial hands. The absorption of first male shagirds and then women disciples is seen in most of the major North Indian styles, and the survival of the gharana styles is in many cases tied with the spectacular success of women singers on the concert stage. The case of thumri singers requires separate treatment, as here the question of gharana itself is less clear. The three women thumri singers who achieved phenomenal renown in the post-independence period were Rasoolan Bai, Siddheswari Devi and Begum Akhtar. All three of them had their roots in the culture that is sometimes labelled tawayef or baiji, though they materially altered these images of themselves in the course of their long careers: Siddheswari, for instance, came from a family of women singers which included Kamaleshwari Bai and Rajeshwari Bai, and reputedly also the famous thumri singer Vidyadhari Bai.

As we have seen before, the music of women thumri singers (starting with Gauhar Jan, though she herself was a versatile artist, and in particular a very great khayal singer) substantially entered into the field of recorded music, and undoubtedly created a new taste for such songs in middle class audiences. The influence of recorded music of women singers on concert/live performance and also on other kinds of musical production is not well documented, but from what we are able to gather, it seems quite important. First of all, recorded songs are carefully listened to by women singers themselves: the records of Gauhar Jan, Zohra Bai and Janaki Bai Allahabadi seem to have been greatly valued. Secondly, male singers listened to, and often included in their repertoire, songs sung by women artists: though it may not be the case always that these songs were learnt 'from' gramophone records, the popularity of the songs must have been a reason why they were learnt and sung by male artists. No less a singer than Mallikarjun Mansur recorded for HMV the geet '*Bin badara bijuri kahan chamake*', popularized by Janki Bai a couple of decades earlier. A third point would be the fact that songs by women singers were carefully studied by music producers in theatre companies: in spite of the prevalent view that the Marathi musical drama was influenced fundamentally by the new taste for khayal, it is likely that the bulk of the tunes were adapted from dadras, chaitis and kajris (in addition of course to local forms like the lavani). Finally, it is well known that concert audiences demanded to hear recorded songs from artists giving live performances, often to their chagrin and despair!

The emergence of thumri singers as concert artists in many ways probes the inconsistencies in middle class male attitudes to baijis and tawayefs. The increasing control of the middle class over the institutions of production and dissemination of music resulted in a sharper criticism of tawayefs and baijis and a professed attempt to exclude them from the sites of music. As a result few thumri singers were able to compete with khayal singers: in fact many khayal singers also sang thumris and dadras, perhaps as a concession to audience taste. The success of singers like Siddheswari Bai and Rasoolan Bai is only partly a result of their great talent and musical knowledge: other singers of equal ability were apparently unable (or reluctant?) to enter into this world. A part must also have been played by male patrons themselves who were willing to extend resources like public concert bookings or official or government support to these artists. But one must also consider the means by which thumri singers recast their identities, distancing themselves from the kotha or private mehfil, often presenting edited and constructed life histories. That many listeners would be aware of their connections with alternative performance traditions apparently did not materially alter these images. Other changes came through marriage or alteration of social position: the thumri singer Shobha Gurtu's mother Menakabai Shirodkar was well known as one of the leading women artists of Bombay, and her house was visited by many well-known musicians. Begum Akhtar recorded extensively under the name of Akhtari Bai Faizabadi. It is likely that the purab thumri as it appeared on the concert stage or on radio underwent certain changes: it appears that it considerably slowed down in tempo (though it is difficult to fully substantiate this point) and became more restrictive in terms of the varieties it included in its repertoire. The infinite variety of forms that constituted the repertoire of the purab thumri were sparsely represented on the stage, a point that can be examined, as we have seen earlier by comparing lists of recorded songs with performance recordings. The stage exerted a new kind of decorum and exclusiveness, sharpened perhaps by the performers' own unwillingness to render songs for instance associated with particular events in the lives of women singers. In the very rare cases that they were, they were clearly decontextualized and sung in the highly serious and reflective style popularized both by Rasoolan and Siddheswari.

A good example is afforded by the composition '*yahin thaiyan hiraye gaili motiyan kahawa ho rama'.* This was sung regularly as a concert and radio performance item by Rasoolan Bai and widely available recordings include an early 78 rpm version as well as a rendering made shortly before her death. It is announced as a dadra on an AIR version. The composition is identified by Reba Muhury as a song related to the ceremony of *nath utarna*, marking the young tawayef's entry into the profession, her loss of virginity, and the song represents the girl looking for her lost pearl. Rasoolan's rendering is indistinguishable in style from other dadras. She also sings only the first two lines of the song, and omits the section in which the young girl speaks of having asked her female relatives as to her lost treasure, but is ashamed to ask her lover 'sainyaji'. Amelia Maciszewski has kindly given me a version of this composition sung by Kalidasi Bai of Muzaffarpur, one of the few living traditional exponents of the purab thumri:

saansuji se pucchalu, nanadaji se puchhalu
sainyaji se puchhata lajaye gaili rama[62]

Other songs of this genre are available on gramophone discs, and it may be pertinent to comment on the song's being divested of its specific temporal value in its reinvention as a concert piece, sung for a large audience where the specific implication of the song would hardly carry any weight at all. Similarly interesting is the emphasis on the 'spiritual' value or meaning of the thumri text, a point well discussed by Vidya Rao in her article on the tawayef: 'the erotic element in music – and Thumri abounded in this – could not escape censure unless it could be read as a metaphor for bhakti. The best an embarrassed brave new nation-state could do with Thumri's erotic lyrics was to invent a tenth rasa – Bhakti'. Thumri singers who entered into the public space often endorsed such readings, undoubtedly as a way of confirming their images as "classical" singers. Happily, the changes in the musical content or style of thumri performances have not been very radical. Rao makes a strong case for the need for thumri to resist appropriation into "the nationalist project of imagining history and culture":[63]

> It is pre-eminently a *shringar rasa* form, an erotic form, unabashedly celebrating the body in its immanence – its beauty, its desires, its joys and sorrows. If it is able to transcend the world, it does this by seeing truth here and now, *in* the body and its desires.[64]

The relatively easy presence of women as concert, radio and gramophone artists since the 1950s, conceals thus a long and troubled history of erasure and marginalization on the one hand, and co-option and adjustment on the other. It would be easy to see the period, we have surveyed, from the middle of the 19th to the middle of the 20th centuries, as one which sees a gradual and steady decline in the profession of the woman singer as a result of alterations in the system of patronage, social hostility, the development of nationalist cultural policies and so on: and it would certainly be right to emphasize these factors. What needs to be added is that like other practitioners of music during this period, women singers too, show considerable skill and dexterity in adapting to new conditions. If at every stage there is loss and forgetting, it seems to be a part of the way in which North Indian classical music has adapted to new conditions of being. At the same time, it has continued to value, and rely on, its internal systems of memory and retrieval: the anecdote, the bandish, the sound recording, the singing voice. At some time in the future perhaps it will be possible to write not only an aesthetics, but also a history, of sound as the repository of musical values.

NOTES

* I am grateful to Urmila Bhirdikar, Sarbari Ray Chowdhury, Kumkum Sangari, Kavita Panjabi, Anindya Banerjee, Aneesh Pradhan, Amie Maciszewski, Adrian McNeil and Aditi Das Gupta for help of various kinds.

1. It is also true that in a general way identifiable woman instrumental artists are a relatively recent phenomenon. Evidence from the Mughal period, for instance, shows that women played both percussion instruments and stringed instruments as part of their performative routine. Abul Fazl's description of the *akhara* "an entertainment held at night by the nobles of this country" mentions women performers on the cymbals, the *pakhawaj*, the *upang*, the Dekhan *rabab*, the *vina* and the *yantra* (*Ain i Akbari* III.7, trans. H. Blochmann (Vol. 1) and D.S. Jarrett (Vol II-III), Delhi: Low Price Publications, 2001, III, p. 273). However, it is not until the mid-20th century that we find women establishing themselves as instrumental artists exclusively. Dr Adrian McNeil, however, has drawn my attention to a woman sarod player in mid 19th century Lucknow: "The Darogha of Department of Entertainers, whose name was Mahdi and who was posted as such during the reign of Jannat Makan (Amjad Ali Shah [1842-47]) persudaded a courtesan, Mahboob Jan, who was famed far and wide for playing sarod and dancing, to come to me under any pretext . . . he thought it might be in his interest and conducive to promotion to bring someone forcibly or under a false plea to me (Amir Hasan, *Palace Culture of Lucknow*, Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation, 1983, p. 14). I am grateful to Dr McNeil for this information.
2. It might be pointed out that women ghazal singers (male and female) might not be popularly thought of as "classical" artists: Farida Khanum, the well known Pakistani singer and a student of Ashiq Ali of Patiala is an example, who is associated with 'lighter' genres.
3. Peter Manuel, *Thumri in Historical and Stylistic Perspectives*, Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass, 1989, (chapters 3-4) pp. 53–78.
4. Especially Manuel's dependence on gramophone records to describe the styles of singers like Gauhar Jan, Zohra Bai and Malka Jan (he does not mention Janki Bai) is very misleading, as these singers were reportedly adept at singing various kinds of songs: even recorded evidence of the early (i.e., pre-1925) period is far more complex than he suggests. Sanyal, incidentally, speaks of Maujuddin as being the

pioneer of the serious vilambit thumri style set to talas like *madhyaman* and *ada* (*Smritir Atale*, p. 9: for bibiographical reference, see n. 23).

5. Vidya Rao ("Thumri and Thumri Singers: Changes in Style and Life-Style", in *Cultural Reorientation in Modern India*, ed. Indu Banga & Jaidev, Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, 1996) points out that Nawab Wajid Ali Shah had made land grants to many of his concubines and muta'h spouses which were cancelled after the advent of the British, p. 288.
6. It might be pointed out however that the number of families that successfully made the change is relatively small; certainly when compared to the diversity of the styles and singing traditions till about the third quarter of the 19th century.
7. See Section 2, "Oral Histories", pp. 6–7.
8. Quoted by Vidya Rao, 301.
9. Alladiya Khan, *My Life*, as told to Azizuddin Khan. trans. Amlan Das Gupta and Urmila Bhirdikar, Calcutta: Thema, 2000, p. 73.
10. Abul Fazl Allami, *The A-in-i Akbari*, trans. H. Blochmann (Vol. 1) and D.S. Jarrett (Vol II-III), Delhi: Low Price Publications, 2001, I, pp. 681–82.
11. *A-in - i Akbari,* (Vol. III), 271–73.
12. Joep Bor, *The Voice of the Sarangi*, Mumbai: NCPA (Vols XV and XVI of the Quarterly Journal of the National Centre of the Performing Arts), 1986-87, p. 81.
13. Bor pp. 83–84, citing N. Manucci, *Storia du Mogor*, vol. II, trans. W. Irvine, Calcutta, 1966, pp. 312–314.
14. Bor, p. 95. It should be noted, however, that the religious identity of performing women artists at this time, as indeed of other ethnic musical groups cannot be simply described. In many cases they seem to have adapted to local religious conditions. I am grateful to Kumkum Sangari for confirmation of this point.
15. Manucci lists 33 overseers, each having the suffix "Bae" to her name and in charge of a group of apprentices. Manucci comments that these singers were originally from Hindu families, *loc.cit.*
16. It may be pertinent to point out here that Kamalbai is described as being adept at singing 'Niamat Khan's *khayal* raga' (Bor, 84). The reference is of course to Niamat Khan 'Sadarang', the reputed inventor (or popularizer) of the form of the *khayal.* It is also interesting to note that Vilayat Husain Khan, the great singer of Agra gharana, recounts in his memoirs the story that Miya Sadarang created the *khayal* to teach the members of the royal harem (*Sangeetajnon ke Samsmaran*, New Delhi: Sangeet Natak Akademi, 1959, pp. 54–55).
17. Bor, 98.
18. It is likely that the arrival of eminent tawayefs in Calcutta was partly a result of the relocation of the Awadh court in Metiaburuz after the expulsion of Wajid Ali Shah. Among the artists who are thought to have a Lucknow connection are Gauhar, Mushtari and Zohra. Anindya Banerjee has drawn my attention to a description of these singers in 'Shri Pantha' 's *Metiaburuijer Nabab*, Ananda, Calcutta, 1990, 112.
19. Bor, p. 103.
20. Bor, p. 96.

21. Alladiya Khan, *My Life*, Introduction, pp. 3–7.

22. Of the many brilliant women artists around the turn of the century, the names of four stand out especially: Gauhar Jan, Malka Jan, Janki Bai and Zohra Bai. Contemporary accounts testify to their standing in the musical community, and their many-sided talent. Gauhar Jan, apparently of Irish and Armenian extraction, was proficient in many languages, and was also a fine poet: Janki Bai, a friend of the poet Akbar Ilahabadi, published a volume of poems entitled *Diwan e Janki*. The reputation of these artists is also undoubtedly related to their connection with the recording industry: Gauhar and Janki especially cut large numbers of records which had wide all-India circulation. Malka Jan too was substantially recorded: Zohra recorded comparatively few discs, but the ones that she did are especially well known for their outstanding musical quality.

23. Amiyanath Sanyal, *Smritir Atale* ("in the recesses of the memory"), 4th edn., ed. Suresh Chakravarty, Jijnasa, Calcutta, 1405 (BS), p. 46.

24. Several instances of Maujuddin's problems with women singers are recorded. In the account of his first meeting with Bhaiyyasahab Ganpatrao, he sings a Lalit bandish which has just been sung by a woman artist, and proceeds to outperform her: he memorizes a song sung by Gauhar Jan and sings it so brilliantly that she does not dare sing it again: when a baiji enters the room he sits with his back facing her. The most telling occasion is when he sings the dadra "nadiya nare" after Sugganbai has sung it at Malka Jan's house. Suggan Bai is so offended that she leaves the room and later there is a quarrel between him and Malka Jan who demand that he apologize to Suggan. Maujuddin refuses to do so and gets out of the conflict by saying that he is sorry if he has hurt Malka's feelings! These breaches of decorum would be strongly criticized in any one else, but Maujuddin's behaviour is apparently excused by the senior members of this musical circle. Ganpatrao apparently believed that he was the reincarnation of a singer called Ahmad Khan who had been insulted by a baiji (*Smritir Atale Maujuddin,* pp. 1–29 passim).

Faiyaz Khan's quarrel with Gauhar Jan has a more specific reason. Sanyal describes a tense encounter between Faiyaz Khan and Gauhar Jan, in which Faiyaz behaves with reserve and even hostility towards Gauhar and does not respond to her gibes. Later we learn that 'in the year of the Ahmadabad Congress'at a concert at Delhi, Malka Jan Agrawali had been out-performed by Gauhar Jan (who danced and sang a tarana in Darbari!). Admirers of the Agra gharana among the audience persuaded Faiyaz to sing both to retrieve the 'honour of his gharana'and demonstrate his love towards Malka Jan. After much persuasion, Faiyaz sings an epic Miya Malhar listening to which the narrator feels as if 'the sea of music has been stirred up wildly by a storm of melody' (p. 86).

There are other notable accounts as well: the protagonist of Sanyal's third essay, 'Kale Khan of Lahore', has an apparently unrequited passion for Gauhar Jan: other accounts speak of a misunderstanding between them. In *Gurujir Baithake*, we find an account of how no less a personality than Bande Ali Khan Beenkar plays a thumri on his "*been*" (something which his audience has never heard before), and the song is '*koyeliya kuhaka* *sunave'* made popular by Zohrabai 'Patnewali', but the narrator pointedly says that it is rendered with the grace of the lachao style of the dhamar not as a "khadi thumri" such as tawayefs can sing. The reference is presumably to the bandish ki thumri delivered by dancers. Interested readers will find a reprint of *Gurujir Baithake* in *Dhruvapad*, annual number, Krishnanagar, 1997.

25. Reba Muhury, *Thumri o Baiji*, Calcutta: Pratibhas, 1986.
26. Muhury, 28.
27. Muhury, pp. 26–27.
28. Suresh Chandvankar "Bai Sundrabai (Jadhav) of Pune, [c.1885-1955]", *The Record News*, Mumbai, Annual Issue, 1999, p. 17.
29. Urmila Bhirdikar, personal communication.
30. See n. 21: the labels of some of her Gramophone Records also mention her Patna connection.
31. B.R. Deodhar, *Pillars of Hindustani Music*, tr. Ram Deshmukh, Mumbai: Popular Prakashan, Mumbai, 1993, rpt. 2001, p. 31.
32. S.V. Gokhale's notes to Govindrao Tembe's *Maza Sangeetacha Vyasang*, ed. Vamanrao Deshpande, Mumbai: Maharashtra Rajya Sanskriti Mandal, 1984, p. 112 f, provide the following information about Baputara or Tarabai: Tarabai and Saraswatibai, two sisters from Weling in Goa learnt dance, instrument playing and singing and then came to Bombay. It is reputed that Sir Premchand Raychand and Seth Lala Dulichand were their patrons. They learnt singing from stalwarts like Murarba Govekar and Ali Hussain (Kawalbachhe). They were extremely beautiful, dignified and cultured. They earned a lot of wealth and also donated a great deal. They were very hospitable and had special affinity for Goan people. They had a large house in Girgaon where Bapu Khote street intersects with Kalbadevi Road (It was a custom in the artist families in Bombay to call the eldest daughter of the family Bapu, that is why Tara was called Tarabapu).

    It is tempting to identify Baputara with Dulichand Seth's Goan wife Tarabai, mentioned by Amiyanath Sanyal (*Smritir Atale*, p. 14) and other writers on early 20th century Calcutta performers, as Baputara, but I have not been able to find sufficient information on this. Deodhar (*Pillars of Hindustani Music*, p. 111), writes, quoting an oral account given by Baba Allauddin Khansahab: "The late Alladiya Khan's disciple Tarabai Welinkar was also in Sethji's (i.e., Dulichand Seth's) employment". Other accounts left by Allauddin Khansahab do not specifically identify Tarabai as Tarabai Welinkar, and I am uncertain of how definite this identification is. Aneesh Pradhan has kindly drawn my attention to another account of the Welinkar sisters in Prabhakar Angle, "Indian Music", in Mario Cabral E Sa, *Wind of Fire: The Music and Musicians of Goa*, New Delhi: Promilla & Co., 1997. Here they are referred to as 'Bapu and Tara', disciples of Balkrishnabuwa Ichalkaranjikar and Hyder Khan.
33. Alladiya Khan, *My Life*, pp. 78–9.
34. Vidya Rao points out the tawayef community indirectly supported a wide range of other activities: flower-selling, pan-selling, crafts and arts, 279.
35. Alladiya Khan, *My Life*, p. 34.

36. Bor, p. 109.
37. Ibid.
38. Vidya Rao, p. 306.
39. The Gramophone Company commenced operations in India in 1902, but Amitabha Ghosh has drawn attention both to earlier efforts by other companies and also to a period of "pre-commercial" recording from the 1890s onwards (*The Record News*, Annual Issue, 2000).
40. Michael Kinnear, *The Gramophone Company's First Indian Recordings 1899-1908*, Bombay: (Mumbai) Popular Prakashan, 1994, p. 11.
41. J. Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, tr. Brian Massumi, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985.
42. W.C. Gaisberg, "The Romance of Recording" Part II, *The Record News*, Vol. 17, January 1995, 44 originally printed in *The Voice* (the house journal of The Gramophone Company, Hayes, England) in 1918.
43. Pierre Bourdieu, 'The Market of Symbolic Goods', *The Field of Cultural Production*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993, p. 121.
44. W.C. Gaisberg, *The Record News*, January 1995, p. 40.
45. Michael Kinnear, "Miss Janki Bai of Allahabad – alias Chhappanchhuri", *The Record News*, Vol. 14, April 1994, p. 6.
46. S.R. Mehta, synopsis of lecture entitled "Mera Naam Janki Bai of Allahabad", *The Record News*, Vol. 7, July 1992, p. 9.
47. There is a problem in enumerating 'classical' artists: I have omitted women who recorded in languages other than Hindustani/ Urdu and who sang exclusively stage songs.
48. A mention in passing might be made of Heerabai Pednekar (1885–1951), identified as the first woman dramatist and music composer on the Marathi stage. An accomplished musician, she provided the settings for compositions of composers of the repute of Shripad Krishna Kolhatkar and R.C. Gadkari.
49. Even though the Gayan Samaj is associated mainly with Bakhale, it was established mainly through the efforts of Nanasaheb Jogalekar, the owner of Kirloskar Natak Mandali. Bhaskarbua was its first principal. Bakhale and Jogalekar's association is discussed in Shaila Datar, *Devagandharva*, Pune: Rajhans Prakashan, 1995.
50. Keeping in mind expensive wire and spool recorders were beyond the reach of most listeners.
51. Amitabha Ghosh, 'Other than his Master's Voice', paper presented at the Centre for Studies in the Social Sciences, Calcutta, 1997. Ghosh also points out that there were many parties interested in broadcasting even before the Indian State Broadcasting Company appeared on the scene. Among them were both private companies (including the Marconis) and scientists (as for instance researchers at the Science College in Calcutta).
52. David Lelyveld, Upon the Subdominant: Administering Music on All-India Radio, *Social Text*, 39, Summer, 1994, p. 117: citing B.V. Keskar, *Indian Music: Problems and Prospects*, Bombay (Mumbai): Popular Prakashan, 1967.

53. Muhury, p. 56.
54. A scrapbook compiled by Annasaheb Bhirdikar, a connoisseur in Dharwar, in the 1940s of photographs of women artists from AIR Sangeet Sammelan advertisements and announcements includes the following: Miss Munni, The Popular Artist, Anwarbai of Agra, Bai Vazirbai of Pune, Farahat Khan Bibbo, Madhubala Dhairyawan, Madhurika Majumdar, Vasanti, Snehaprabha Pradhan (probably a *kulin* singer of 30-40s), Sushila Tembe, Kalindi Puntambekar, Tarabai of Terdal, Leela Limaye, Sarojini Vaze, Dina Daruwala, Mirabai Badkar, Sheela Pandit, Shyama Zutshi, Kaneez Khatoon, Shanta Apte, Kesar Wadke, Leela Khare of Poona, Jamnabai Hublikar, Indirabai Wadkar, Shamabai of Kolhapur. I am grateful to Urmila Bhirdikar for allowing me to see the scrapbook and commenting on the artists.
55. Sheila Dhar, *Here's Someone I'd Like You to Meet*, Delhi: Oxford India Paperbacks, 1996.
56. Kumarprasad Mukhopadhyay, *Mehfil*, Calcutta: Srishti, 2001, p. 53 f.
57. Alladiya Khan, *My Life*, Introduction, 23; see Govindrao Tembe, *Gayanmaharshi Alladiya Khan Yanche Charitra*, ed. Vamanrao Deshpande, Bombay, 1994.
58. Ustads from the Agra gharana – the singing style of which is still often described as being "unsuitable" for the female voice – in fact taught a great many women artists who achieved fame as gramophone and radio artists as well as on the concert stage. Among them are Saraswatibai Fatarpekar, Shyamala Manjgaonkar, Vatsala Kumthekar, Dipali Talukdar (Nag) and Purnima Sen.
59. *Samsad Bangali Charitabhidhan*, (4th edition) ed. Anjali Basu , Vol. I, Calcutta: Sahitya Samsad, 1998, p. 439.
60. The phrase is Amelia Maciszewski's. I am very grateful to Dr Maciszewski for sharing with me information and recorded data about living practitioners of thumri and dhrupad.
61. Urmila Bhirdikar has supplied me with the following information about Hirabai from a biography written by Rajaram Humane (*Dhanya Janma Jahala*, Pune: Shrividya Prakashan, 1980): Hirabai first performed in a concert organized by Vishnudigambar Paluskar in 1922; the concert was publicized through announcements from a tanga, accompanied by a band. Her first Gramophone record was cut in 1923. Tarabai shifted to Pune in 1925, and in that year Hirabai gave a concert at the Aryabhushan theatre, accompanied by Sureshbabu Mane on the harmonium and Balwantrao Rukadikar on the harmonium. Ticket rates were two rupees to four annas. Very few people came to these jalsas initially and there was a lot of opposition from musicians and patrons. Women did not come at all. But slowly the scene changed. Hirabai is usually considered the first kulin woman to appear on the stage (in 1929).
62. Amelia Maciszewski, personal communication and private recording. The lines could be translated as 'I've asked my mother-in-law, I asked my sister-in-law/But I'm ashamed to ask my lover'.
63. Rao, p. 304.
64. Rao, pp. 305–6.

CHAPTER 19

Reassembling the Modern: An Indian Theatre Map since Independence

Anuradha Kapur

We, who are from countries that are crisscrossed by various experiences of time, modes of being, processes of production, orality and literacy, newspapers and cable televisions, have to be very careful with the use of the word tradition.[1] In a very general sense, we know of course, that tradition means handing down knowledge of various sorts, or of passing a doctrine, but somewhere there is another subtextual sense as well, that this handing down is done with respect and duty. Handing down active knowledge, kits of survival, modes of behaviour, ways of speaking, singing or dancing, is one thing but doing this with respect and duty quite another. When the move from what might be transferred from mother to daughter or from father to son is narrowed or enlarged, depending on the way one looks at it, so as to become abstract, and develops into an authorizing or exhorting force imbued with a sense of the "age-old", of "ceremony", of "gravity", which occasion respect and duty, an altogether different set of values enter the argument.

We know that words such as *tradition, age-old, ceremony*, stabilize events, customs, modes of living; seen this way tradition cannot be tampered with, only preserved; it needs to be salvaged so as to save what is authentic in it from a present rapidly becoming a past. Yet we know that it takes, in some very real way, no more than two generations for customs and actions to become 'traditional' (as opposed to being modern, innovative fragmented or even tainted). We know also that constructing a performing 'tradition' is by nature freezing it at the precise moment of its inscription. Therefore for the purpose of this paper, let me problematize the word in several ways and thereafter construct a thumbnail sketch of Indian theatre practice of the last fifty years and some of its traditions.

I shall do that by adjusting a lens on the 1990s when debates around the organizing principles of performance crystallized and allowed for a remapping of contemporary practice, especially in Hindi theatre. This means that a number of important figures of modern theatre will not be brought up in this paper – as I will seek to position, emblematically as it were, only those practitioners on whom certain tendencies converge, and because of whose work certain ideological moves are explicated.

I

In attempting to assemble a history of the practices of Indian theatre, we face a double problem. There is little archaeology of theatre forms when compared to the number of forms that exist. Thus there may be rich detail available for one form, and almost nothing for another. Our levels of textualizing performance are varied. Take for example *Kuttiyattam*, the only traditional form of Sanskrit drama surviving in India today. The *Cakyars* have been performing this as obligatory duty since the ninth century; *Kuttiyattam* is then at least a thousand years old. *Ascaryacudamani* attributed to Saktibhadra who is believed to have lived in the late 9th or early 10th century is one of the most important texts of *Kuttiyattam*. A companion production manual *Ascaryacudamaniyute Kramadipika* is still extant and gives a scene-by-scene guideline for production. In comparison, the dance form, *Bharata Natyam*, has been reconstructed for the use of the Indian middle class, only in the 1930s and 40s. Today it is the very standard of national culture, the almost sole custodian of the *essence*, India.

B.V. Karanth uses *Yakshagana*[2] for a version of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*[3] in the 1970s; this traditional form, like *Bharata Natyam*, is also a 'reconstructed' version of *Yakshagana*. During the early 20th century, a salvage operation on existing forms such as the *Yakshagana* was attempted so as to prevent its retrospective loss. Yet what was put together was necessarily the result of a choice, in response to the specific and precise demands of that historical moment; thus the scholar and poet K.S. Karanth (1902–1997) assembled a *Yakshagana* that was an imagined authenticity. Performance history may then be an archival idea, produced, among other things, by copied and recopied manuals like those of *Ascarayacudamani*, by a web of memories, by a succession of apprenticeships.

In some senses all these imagined authenticities are fables of identity where the ultimate referent is a spirit untainted by the fragmentation of modern life. If this is the case, then tradition is more a tradition of what we seek to recover; not unchanging and age-old, but it's very opposite, transformed and used. Tradition then is a history of change, something which is in constant flux, and therefore something that need not be set off against modernity, and its result, the loss of authenticity.

II

At the outset I should like to look at two major paradigms of traditions-in-use in India. One, the popular theatre called the Company Theatre or the Parsi Theatre,[4] enormously successful all over India between 1860 and 1930, and the other, the Theatre of Roots,[5] as it is sometimes called, which became important as an organizing principle through the late 1960s to the 1980s.

The influence of the Parsi Theatre is not usually accredited in the reckoning we make of contemporary theatre because the Parsi Theatre cannot claim for itself a classical lineage, but is instead, of mixed parentage. I shall look at this in greater detail; Suffice it to say here that it is seen to have a great degree of western influence, endurably in the use of the architectural proscenium arch which came to India in the 1870s and created a significant shift in stage relations. Although it is self-evident, let me say here that these relations were materially different from the relations set up in the open forms of pre-colonial India. The Parsi Theatre's influence on acting, scenography, dramatic structure, music, is widespread even today, but is peripheral to the debates that centre on authenticity and the retrieval of that.

The Theatre of Roots is an outcome of that inevitable moment in a postcolonial scenario where a retrieval of those forms that were seen to be lost under the hegemonic pressures of the colonial regime is sought. Pre-modern forms, especially those that were uncontaminated by 'western influences', are affirmed and put to use in theatre practice. It is within these two broad categories of tradition that I wish to place some moments of the last fifty years.

Marian Pastor Roces[6] tells a story about a traditional gong-maker in the Philippines whose splendid gongs were crafted out of the brass that war bullets yielded. What then can be coded as traditional?

The Parsi Theatre is an eclectic form – of mixed origin, and of unlike parts, a new formation, taking stories from the Persian *Shah Nama*, and the fabulous *Arabian Nights*, from the singing and performing traditions of nineteenth century Indian courtesans, from Victorian melodrama, from Shakespeare as performed by Western touring companies, European realistic narrative structures, British amateur theatricals, and from the visual regime of the major Indian painter Raja Ravi Verma (1846–1906). Ravi Verma's images became the canon from where contemporary costume, gesture, and body type was derived and which, to this day, informs the iconography of gods and heroes, in calendars, oleographs, and popular art down to recent TV series in India. This 'body' performs a whole range of roles that extends from inhabiting mythic characters to middle class ones: epic encounters between good and evil and the quandaries of the modern Indian are enacted – child marriage, female literacy, gambling, religious sectarianisms, alcohol abuse are the reformist narratives of the newly forming nation.[7] For example, Radheyshyam Kathavachak's *BharatMata* (1918), Agha Hashra Kashmiri's *Bharat ki Pukar*, and *Ankh ka Nasha* (1924*)*, Naryan Prasad Betab's *Hamari Bhool* (starring Akhtari Faizabadi), and *Kumari Kinnari* (1928) played at the Congress session in Calcutta, were examples of such storylines; Prithvi Raj Kapoor's *Deewar* (1945), *Gaddar* (1947) and *Pathan* (1948) were enormously popular secular narratives touring India, Burma, Sri Lanka, Java, and Africa in the late 1940s and 1950s.

Characters in these narratives, like most other modern characters, are full of self-divisions. As an example, the division between love and duty creates heroic struggles that go especially well with the stories produced by the first wave of nationalist fervour. For instance, in the film *Naya Daur* (1957), the making of an asphalt road functions as an allegory for the making of a modern nation but at the same time the nationalist modernist argument about the perils of progress is also set out.[8] The road finally connects people, and hearts, and reduces religious distance. These new Indian characters are composed by a deep idealism in which social evil is exposed so that it can be rectified.

Such idealism rapidly dockets into a modernist disillusionment with the new nation and becomes related to the dark social realism of the 1950s and 1960s. Dharamvir Bharati (1926–1997), Mohan Rakesh (1925–1972), Vijay Tendulkar (1929–), all important playwrights of the 1950s and 1960s, move into an existential modern vocabulary where ruthless exposures are performed on societal corruptions; this is done metaphorically in plays of Bharati and realistically in Rakesh and Tendulkar. Bharati's *Andha Yug* (Blind Age), based on the Indian epic *Mahabharata*, is an allegorical reading of the text where the heroic self-divisions of the characters yield the classic modernist tropes of doubt, angst, and terror. Tendulkar turns idealism upon its head by putting the hypocrisies of the Indian middle class in the dock and by stripping away its tawdry concerns.

Girish Karnad (b.1938), one of India's leading playwrights, firmly positions postcolonial concerns in his enterprise: he does so by rethinking mythic material and by reshaping it around modernist concerns of subjectivity.[9] Karnad psychologizes myth and produces characters with motivations hidden and apparent, transferred and accepted; self-divisions here are not played out within the heroic mode but within existentialist constraints of love. The divisions – between self and self, between loving and unloving, between two kinds of love, between love and instrumentality – are modern, but the characters within whom they are acted out, are mythic or heroic, taken as they are from traditional materials – from the epics for instance, as also from the *Kathasaritsagara.*[10] Interesting modernist contradictions emerge in the writing: myths and epics become, as it were, a civilizational weight on the playwright and that puts in place its corollary, the constant desire to unpack it by modernizing it.

Even though E. Alkazi does not fit into the paradigm of the Parsi Theatre and that of the Theatre of Roots that I have outlined to position the debates of the 1990s, it is imperative to situate his enormously significant intervention into Indian theatre, from the early 1960s to late 1970s. Alkazi put in place, almost single-handedly as it were, a modernist realist idiom into the Hindi theatre which affected theatre production across regions and across languages. His staging of Mohan Rakesh's *Ashadh ka Ek Din* (One Day in Ashadh) or Dharamvir Bharati's Andha *Yug* (Blind Age), both written in the 1960s and produced in 1962–63, presented these texts with a realist exactitude hardly ever seen before; his meticulous attention to detail crafted stage pictures that were consequent on the precise cultural context indicated in the play and had little to do with building ornamental or attractive scenery. The architectural discipline of his staging was distinct from the decorative *mis-en-scene* of the Parsi Theatre or the open improvisatory staging of a director like B.V. Karanth.

B.V. Karanth (1928–2002), active for three decades in Indian theatre chiefly as director but also as music composer, tried to put forward a counter narrative to realism and sought to ease open the realist fixities that had become established in the 1960s and 1970s. Like Karnad's desire to remodel traditional texts, Karanth sought to modify and recycle traditional performance vocabularies. Karanth used the *rangpati*,[11] the chorus, the narrator, the *Sutradhar*,[12] he used music, mime, dance, stylized as well as naturalistic modes of acting, he used concepts borrowed from the *Natyashastra*, and from the Parsi Theatres, and put this eclectic lexicon on an empty transformative stage common to most traditional performances.

Karanth's open form, his non-convergent, episodic narrative, with the story dispersed or displaced into theatrical strategies taken from both classical and folk sources – might one call his sort of work "traditional" in that it seeks to reaffirm Indianness through the use of time-honoured materials? And by so doing, might one implicate the question of identity into it?

I suggest that Karanth's engagement with theatre language, his interest in a wide variety of performance protocols, is a modernist commitment to reconditioning traditional vocabularies for contemporary use. Thus his work shifts the debate on forms outside the frame of the authentic, and outside the frame of Indianness as well. The counter narrative he assembles is not a pedagogical enterprise that is intent on defining identity or prescribing ways of being Indian. Indeed it is not even concerned with programming a "look" for Indian theatre.

III

Identity was redefined, along with tradition, in the early 1980s. This redefinition, as it were, has a great deal to do with a new and spectacular use of tradition as ornament, as national identity, and as 'difference' in the work of Ratan Thiyam. Ratan Thiyam (b. 1948) moves from the premises that were set up by the Theatre of Roots as practiced by Shanta Gandhi (1917–2002), Habib Tanvir (b. 1923) and K.N. Panniker (b. 1928), among others, to a *spectacular mode* that becomes globally legible because of its formal sophistication. From its global success, so to speak, it moves to become the most valued herald of contemporary Indian theatre. Deriving a performance vocabulary based on Manipuri martial arts and the lyrical *Vaisnava* traditions local to Manipur, Ratan Thiyam's work signals debates on Indianness in ways that other contemporary work has not been able to do. In a crucial sense, it makes apparent that the use of a performance language derived from folk or traditional theatres is very much an ideological construct, and that such language almost necessarily includes a critique of 'modern societies' because it can be taken as being intrinsically expressive of the 'spirit' of a nation, of its underlying beliefs and values, articulated in speech, music, gait, or costume. Almost certainly these values, apparently manifesting unique cultural specifics, can also function as cultural exchange – ways of signalling what makes a country and its forms 'different'. And being markers of cultural exceptionality, these values need to be safeguarded, to be preserved, as 'attractions' of that particular cultural configuration. Ratan Thiyam, it seems to me, makes vexed joineries between 'product' and 'identity'; and between 'difference' and 'attractions'.

Two paradigms – that of the Parsi Theatre, the hugely popular modern commercial entertainment that produced an ever expanding audience, and that based it's theatrical experience on profusion, and excess and eclecticism – and the Theatre of Roots that concerned itself, in some senses, with anthropological retrieval by developing reconstructed forms cover roughly the uses of tradition in our recent history of theatre practice.

In an age where clarity and permanence of affiliations may have given way to an uneven configuration between the local, regional and the national, it seems all the more interesting that Ratan Thiyam's work navigates these uneven classificatory demands of the ethnic to produce the more prescriptive Indian identity, and more symbologies, than the work of B.V. Karanth and others of that generation. Questions of inflecting subjectivities or gender do not occupy both these projects.

IV

In the last decade some very challenging work has been done by women directors as they have shifted the debate towards new forms, and towards new subjectivities. Though their productions are very different, a broad trajectory unites them: their bringing the question of gender on the stage, which has remained almost unaddressed in modern performance.

This body of work presents two things: it considers as its *subject* a sort of experience that may have been for the most part invisible till now; and then visibilizes this experience in ways that displace some of the narrative strategies currently in use. Parenthetically, I must add that I see the articulation of such experience as not being attempted by women alone; but for the purposes of this paper I shall look at the work of women theatre practitioners working mainly in Hindi.[13]

What does attempting to put a gendered language in theatre imply? Are different narratives, stories and characters sought to be produced ? Are there altogether different ways of structuring event, life scripts and plot? Does that entail another way of manipulating experiential time and space, and therefore temporality, and therefore sequentiality?

Women practitioners have experimented with the process and form of dramatic *writing* on the one hand, and with the processes of directing or *constructing* a play on the other, and have put in place a revised set of authorial and professional relationships. For one thing, new dramatic structures that stress collective and cooperative working processes by giving precedence to *performance* rather than to the *playscript* have come into circulation. This has adjusted the perspective on both writing and on performing.

It is possible to argue that event, plot and character shade into each other, at least in theatre. And while it is self-evident that this is relevant to theatre made by men and women alike, I bring this into discussion here as all the three coordinates have engaged women practitioners one way or another.

A sequence of events is plot; provided we consider plot not just as a simple journey from one event to another: for an event can be such that it can come to pass in mental space, or it can occur in physical, material space. All events, even mental ones, are physicalized on stage, as happenings. On stage, action is only action if it is visible or physical. This physicalization takes place largely on the actor's body (which stands in, as it were, for the character's body) and through the *mise-en-scene.* If events are plotted in space (and time), as well on the character's body then there is no easy way to separate event from character (for the character is the carrier of event) and character from plot.

Recent work by women has sought to reestimate the nature and meaning of 'event', that life-altering unit of time, by configuring event as related to character and not entirely to heroic action. Events may be fragmented into a series of *moments.* And these moments may not *appear* to be life changing but may still be so; they may not appear to make ostentatious or grand revisions to our existence and yet initiate death, departure, deception and atonement. During the space of a meal, or a song, during a glance held, or a morsel swallowed, people may "die", make liaisons, decide on a new life, betray their beloveds. Because inner lives veer, falter, expand, and contract, an entire story may begin and end in a simple everyday action. So while, on the one hand, there maybe no 'event' to speak of, several life-changing decisions may have altered the perceptual maps of the characters.

These seemingly timid or faint manoeuvres might also be designated indirect action, where an exceptionally transfiguring moment is not conspicuous on stage. To map these loops and breaks, these meanderings and these faultlines, the plot has to be made in such a way that its joineries are kept loose to allow deflection. To rework the meaning of *development* in character as in plot – which is usually understood as being a chain of events notching one into another in a directional way, and direction as being secured to the conventional pillars of story telling (that of beginning middle and end) – traditional plot devices and even dependence on dialogic communication requires questioning. The plot/character configuration needs to transit towards a new set of subjectivities in order to unsettle expected portrayals. Changes in the way of drawing character result in redrawing the parameters of plot.

Consequently in some women's theatrework plot is frequently circular, and refuses resolution, character can change status, personality, and even gender, crossing society's artificially maintained boundaries of roles and station; objects can induce relationships, and imaginary landscapes produce tangible attachments (as in Neelam Man Singh Chowdhry and Anamika Haksar's work).

Neelam Man Singh Chowdhry, who works in Chandigarh, runs a company of about twelve actors. They are both urban and non-urban performers. The non-urban performers are called *Naqqals,* female impersonators who sing, dance, and do stand-up-comedy, mimicry and balladeering. Other actors in her company have grown up in cities, and have obtained modern education, in drama schools or universities. By putting such a company together, Neelam Man Singh manages to construct before our very eyes, folk traditions in collision (and therefore in transformation), with the 'contemporary' in Indian theatre, with contemporary Indian "bodies". Such collisions make 'tradition' unstable and the audience is forced to rethink it. Because Neelam puts female impersonators side by side with urban actresses, today's women so to speak, she also destabilizes gender representations.

In some senses, there is a reluctance in Neelam Man Singh Chowdhry to pin down women to any ready-made interpretation; in her productions of *Yerma,*[14] *Madwoman,*[15] and *Fida*[16] there is an excess – costume, gesture, speech, and temperament break the bounds of the permissible and expand by theatrical invention into eloquent melodrama, passion, and agitation – that allows for a generosity of character. Neelam's theatricalization of Yerma's desire is an example. Yerma sings and laments, expressing her yearning for a child; while Yerma tosses on the ground, a rope, strung between two twigs held in the hands of two female impersonators, is set alight above her head; the female impersonators stay impassive and stolid, as if made of stone; the fire eats up the rope and a tracery of ash crumbles on to Yerma. The ash, the song, the longing, bracketed between two chimerical women, unsettles many assumptions, about corporeal and illusory women (and men), about love, desire, and bonding.

Destabilizing or deconstructing gender norms has been a concern in Amal Allana's work as well. Amal Allana, who works in Delhi, seeks to make gender mobile, as it were, by disturbing stereotypes. This she does by shifting and restructuring the elements of gender in her production of *Himmat Mai*[17] for example, where she cast the distinguished actor Manohar Singh in the part of Mother Courage/Himmat Mai. By making this exceptional casting she reallocated the attributes of feminity and masculinity – passivity, patience, nurturing, sympathy, on the one hand; aggression, courage, bravery, single-mindedness, and authority, on the other – from a woman's 'role' to a man's 'body' and *vice versa*, and thus redefined them.

My work too has been concerned with upsetting sexual and gender hierarchies. Two projects that dovetailed into each other examined cross-dressing, and by allusion, androgyny. The first performance was a one-woman show along with an installation that was based on a Bertolt Brecht story, *The Job.*[18] *The Job* is about a woman who takes over her dead husband's post, which is that of a night watchman in a factory, and impersonates him for four years to keep her children from starving. She wins high praise for her courage and loyalty and then because of an accident in the factory, she is discovered to be a woman. No amount of pleading, legal or otherwise, gets her her job back. It is given to those who have 'male' stamped on their papers.

This play attempted to look at the repercussions of a woman becoming a man; its dangers and its transgressions, and in the context of the story, its disastrous consequences. For me it was especially important to consider this subversive masquerade as the reverse, or negative of the concept of female impersonation as female impersonation continues to exist in India as an honoured tradition.[19]

Sundari: an Actor Prepares[20] is a performance based on the autobiography of the celebrated female impersonator, Jaishankar Sundari who performed all over India between 1901 and 1931.[21] Sundari became the rage of Bombay; enormously popular especially with women, for whom he became a sort of model, setting the style for every thing from dress to deportment. The performance sought to investigate the enigmatic presence of the man–woman figure in the theatre, and the cross-gender fascination it has characteristically conjured in audiences. Even though the premise of female impersonation almost always rests on the idea of an essential femininity, its performance sought to emphasize that gender is actually constructed in practice and that it is in fact encoded in demeanour, costume, manner, and convention.

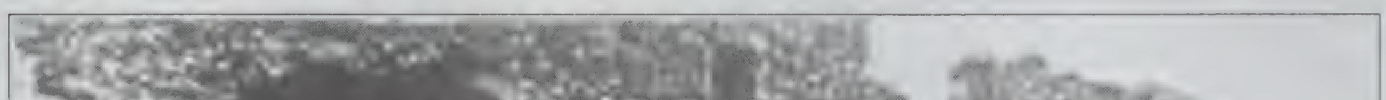
Consistently concerned with finding unorthodox expressive structures within the theatre, Anamika Haksar's work does not play by any standard rules of story telling – her narratives are non-linear and non-convergent, often circular; they are baggy and meandering, not tight and conclusive. By making room for interjections, lapses in concentration and changes in direction, Anamika Haksar makes a formal subversion, as it were, and plots an unusually generous narrative, encompassing stylization and naturalism, inner and outer realities, material and spiritual worlds. *Antar Yatra*,[22] a production she directed in the mid-1990, is profoundly affected by the structure of the playing space, which was a constructed circular tent opening into a seventy-foot deep field. The lives of her epic characters unfold, expand, and take in the wide field, which then get translated into becoming their mental prospect, their dreamscape. Desire, thought, and longing are made visible, *manifest*, in this vast expanse and simultaneously made contingent, *conditional*, on atmosphere and on topography.

This distribution of the attributes of the self into landscape, objects, scenery and props makes character *ephemeral*, as it were, and breaks up the notion of the unified individual. It puts to question among other things, the notion of characterization itself. It foregrounds the provisionality of life scripts, which are frequently full of contradictions that are hard to resolve into any coherent representation.

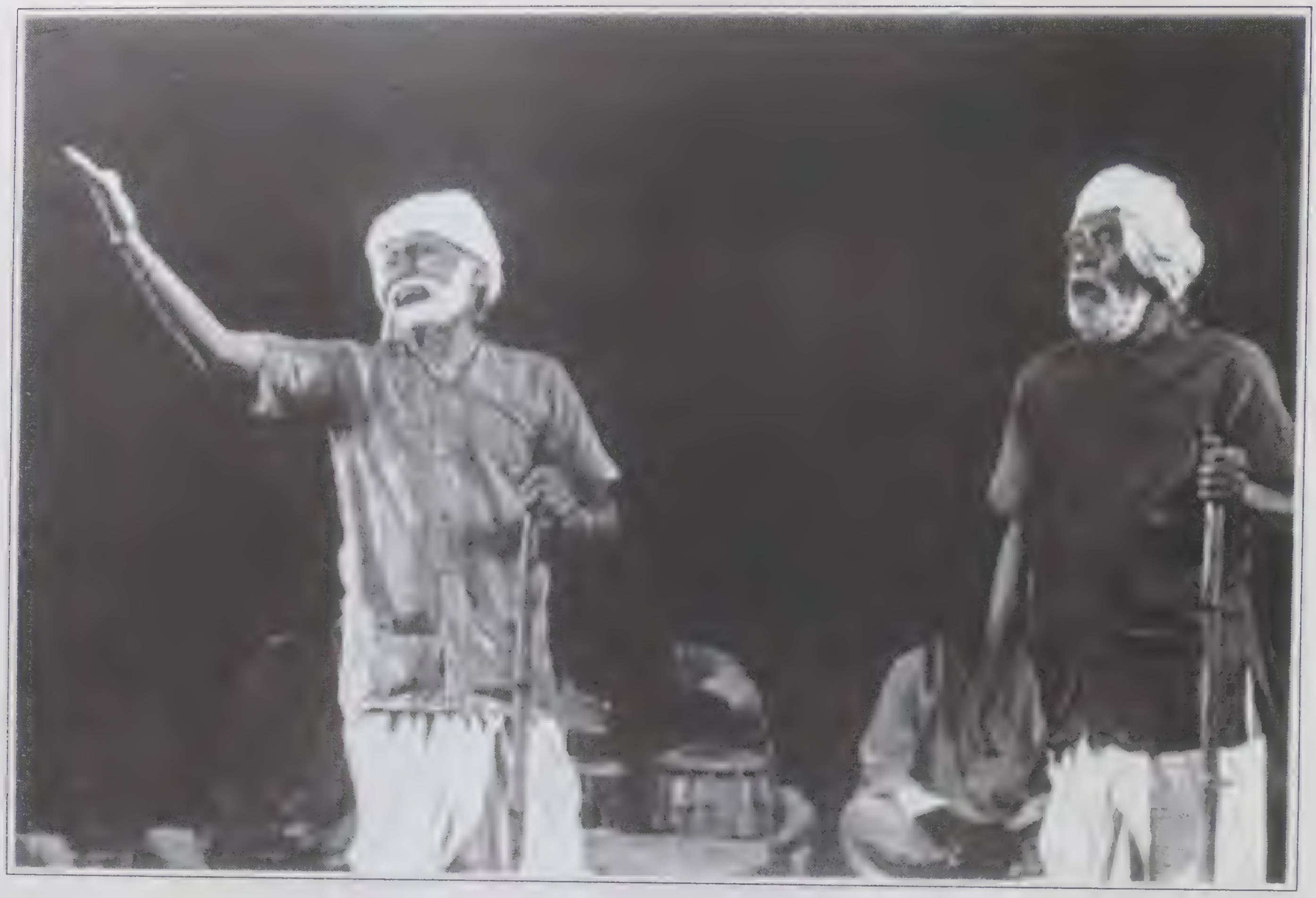
V

In conclusion, theatre made by women directors of the1990s attempts to undo the sutures that might have been put in place to hold together the idea of a composite Indian identity. The figural paradox of the female impersonator stages the questions of gender and identity

Tughlaq, E. Alkazi, *Courtesy: National School of Drama*



Tughlaq, E. Alkazi, *Courtesy: National School of Drama*



Habib Tanvir, *Courtesy:* S. Thyagrajan, *National School of Drama*

Gokula Nirgamana, B.V. Karanth,
Courtesy: S. Thyagrajan, *National School of Drama*

Gokula Nirgamana, B.V. Karanth,
Courtesy: S. Thyagrajan, *National School of Drama*

Nagmandala, Amal Allana, *Courtesy:* S. Thyagrajan, *National School of Drama*

Fida, Neelam Mansingh Choudhry,
Courtesy: S. Thyagrajan, *National School of Drama*

Fida, Neela Mansingh Choudhry, *Courtesy:* S. Thyagrajan, *National School of Drama*

Sundari: An Actor Prepares
Anuradha Kapur, *Courtesy:* S. Thyagrajan, *National School of Drama*

Nagmandala, Amal Allana, *Courtesy:* S. Thyagrajan, *National School of Drama*

Ratan Thiyam
Courtesy: S. Thyagrajan, *National School of Drama, New Delhi*

Ratan Thiyam
Courtesy: S. Thyagrajan, *National School of Drama, New Delhi*

– essences are undone through performance. The feminine then becomes a masquerade, a staging, one of many possible guises. The impermanence of such masquerades is stressed and as a consequence character itself becomes porous, permeable, not unyielding and predetermined. By making fragility central to structure and plot, these productions raise some crucial questions about re-historicizing narrative in ways that can animate the problematic of gender and subjectivity, of identity and Indianness, and manoeuvre the razor's edge between the 'traditional' and the 'modern' for our time.

NOTES

Note: Some of the issues taken up in this paper have been previously discussed in the following essays: 'A Wandering Word, an Unstable Subject' in *Theatre India* No. 3, May 2001 (pp. 5–12) and 'Female Impersonation, Narration and the Invention of Desire' in Dalmia, Vasudha and Stuart Blackburn (eds.) *India's Literary History: Essays on the Nineteenth Century.* Permanent Black, Delhi, 2004.

1. A version of this paper was initially presented at a seminar on South Asian Theatre at Hanoi in October 1998. It has subsequently gained from discussions at a South Asia Seminar at the University of California at Berkeley in 1999; and at Miranda House, University of Delhi in 2000.
2. Yakshagana is a traditional form from southern India that uses mythic material for its plots and has very vigorous dancing, singing and percussive music.
3. B.V. Karanth's production of *Macbeth* was called *Birnam Vana* (Birnam Woods) and was translated and adapted into Hindi by Raghuvir Sahay.
4. The heyday of the Parsi Theatre Companies was between the 1850s and the 1930s, after which they converted to cinema companies and the theatres they had built became studios.
5. A term coined by Suresh Awasthi, theatre scholar and critic, in the 1980s.
6. Marian Pastor Roces, in paper presented at the symposium *Inroads: Asia*, Los Angeles, August 1997.
7. This body is transformed into the 'modern Indian body type' through cinema, as Parsi Theatre companies converted into cinema companies in the 30s.
8. See Ashish Rajadhyaksha and Paul Willemen, *Encyclopedia of Indian Cinema*, Oxford University Press, 1995.
9. Among Girish Karnad's celebrated plays are *Yayati* (1961), *Tughlaq* (1964), *Hayavadana* (1971), *Nagamandala* (1988), *Taledanda* (1990) and *Agni aur Barkha* (Fire and the Rain) (1995).
10. The famous collection of fairy tales composed by the Kashmiri poet Somadeva in about AD 1070.
11. A hand-held and therefore mobile curtain used for entrances and exits in most traditional theatre forms.
12. The main narrator, and sometimes singer, whose name means the 'one who holds the strings' (of the narrative), like a puppeteer.

13. For a more detailed reading of 'feminist' theatre practice in India see my 'A Wandering Word, an Unstable Subject' in *Theatre India* No. 3, May 2001 (pp. 5–12).
14. After Lorca's play. The production was made and extensively performed in the early 1990s.
15. An adaptation of *Madwoman of Chaillot* by Jean Giraudoux, produced and performed in the 1990s.
16. Based on Racine's *Phaedre*, performed in the late 1990s.
17. An adaptation of Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage and her Children*, *Himmat Mai* was produced in the early 1990s.
18. Based on Bertolt Brecht's story *The Job,* the play was produced in the mid 1990s. It had an installation and video animation by the distinguished artist Nalini Malani and was translated into Hindi by Atul Tiwari. Bertolt Brecht, *Collected Stories*, edited and introduced by John Willett and Ralph Manheim, Methuen, London, 1983, 1999. See also Bertolt Brecht [1933], *Der Arbeitsplatz oder Im Schweisse Deines Angesichts sollst Du kein Brot essen* (Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1997).
19. Female impersonation has a long and varied history in India. Among the traditional theatre forms that employ female impersonation are Krishnattam, Ramlila, Raslila, Yakshagana, Therukuttu, Bhavai, Jatra. These forms are principally devoted to enacting epic and mythological materials. Women were disallowed from the stage, all the way till the late 19th century and when they come into the theatre, as also into cinema, in the 20th they were usually courtesans; but notwithstanding the stigma connected to acting, singing and dancing, there was an overlap between female impersonators and actresses. The smaller, walk-on parts were reserved for women and the more complicated characters, for female impersonators, some of whom achieved unrivaled success, such as Jaishankar Sundari (1889–1975) and Bal Gandharva (1888–1967).
20. *Sundari: an Actor Prepares* was produced in the late 190s.The design was by Bhupen Khakkhar and Nilima Sheikh, the music design was by Vidya Rao and the dramatization was by Getanjali Shree and Dinesh Khanna.
21. Sundari's autobiography was in part written and in part dictated by Sundari to his son, Dinkar Bhojak. Sundari, Jaishankar/Dinkar Bhojak, *Thoda Ansu Thoda Ful*, Ahmedabad: Shivji Asher, Vora & Co, (1976); recently translated into Hindi by Dinesh Khanna as *Thode Ansu Thode Phul*, National School of Drama, Delhi, (2002).
22. *Antar Yatra* was based on Ilanko Atikal's, *Cilappatikaram* (The Jewelled Anklet) traditionally believed to have been composed in fifth century AD.

CHAPTER 20

Women Artists of Rural India

Jyotindra Jain

In the traditional Hindu social classification, each group of professional artisans formed a separate community based on the craft practised by it.[1] As such we have regional castes of carpenters, blacksmiths, potters, etc. The male members of these castes played a major role in the production and marketing of their ware. Though, in most cases the women of these communities participated in the production processes of the work of their male counterparts, their own role in the making of art/craft confined to objects and decorations related to domestic and ritual practices. As in most societies, in India, too, men were productive and women unproductive or reproductive. Women decorated the floor with auspicious designs at the entrance to the house, adorned walls with sacred motifs for worship on the occasion of a wedding or religious festival. They also undertook making of dolls and toys and practiced embroidery for domestic use. Traditionally, none of these were meant for sale, nor for exhibition or award. In other words, the public professional space was the male domain and the women confined to the domestic space.

The professional male crafts practitioner until independence enjoyed the position of the supreme 'creator'/'master' (women's role at various levels of production not withstanding), and had direct access to public spaces. The Hindu canon on art and architecture does not mention women as makers of cultic images and the Puranas debar them from entering the sacred spaces, on occasions even the kitchen (normally the female domain) and from participating in certain rituals on the ground of 'impurity' connected with menstruation. In the nineteenth century there was tremendous impetus given to crafts but their representation in the public spaces generally excluded women. After independence, when the national awards for the craftspersons were established, women also began to receive them. However, they were virtually excluded from the major colonial art and craft exhibitions held in London, Glasgow, Paris, etc.[2] Handicrafts policy of independent India made strong endeavours to provide equal opportunities to women artisans, thanks to the contribution of Kamala Devi Chattopadhyaya, Indira Gandhi and Pupul Jaykar.[3] Despite social restrictions both on Hindu and Muslim women's participation in exhibitions, crafts bazaars and national award competitions, 80 women have received the President's National Awards for Excellence in Craftsmanship between 1965 and 1993.[4] To encourage women to participate in the government organised folk art/craft exhibitions, held in major Indian cities and abroad, they are provided with an escort at government expense. This new exposure, visibility and institutionalised patronage and promotion of rural women's art practices have given a new creative bent to their work leading to women's group identity as in the case of organised mirror-embroidery production of Kutch or the Chikkankari work of Lucknow, and recognition of individual artists such as Sita Devi, Baua Devi, Ganga Devi, Mahasundari Devi, Godavari Dutta, etc. in the sphere of Mithila painting, Sonabai in clay sculpture and relief work of Sarguja and Neelamani Devi in the art of Manipur pottery. Ganga Devi, Baua Devi, Sonabai and Neelamani Devi, among others, have received international acclaim for their innovative and individualistic work and their work has been exhibited in some of the most prestigious spaces of modern art abroad.[5] These artists have been generally excluded from being shown together with the high-profile urban Indian artists in India, because the urban art spaces are zealously guarded against the entry of the contemporary folk artists by the moderns primarily on aesthetic ground.[6] In fact, the well-organised contemporary urban women artists have shown little concern or interest in the works of rural women artists, even when these reflected contemporary issues or even conscious expression of their struggle as women. In 1998, when Sonabai's work was prominently displayed at the Queensland Art Gallery in Brisbane as a part of the Asia-Pacific Triennial, a renowned modern Indian woman artist had protested against the entry of a rural artist in the space of 'modern' art.

In the latter part of this article, I have discussed the cases of Ganga Devi, Sonabai and Neelamani Devi whose lives have been a long struggle against male domination and envy and who despite these hurdles have engaged in pursuing their artistic careers. In all these cases, the works are marked by a deep rooting in their own inherited practices of women's art as well as an effort to depart from the collective tradition in favour of individual expression. This is a significant aesthetic shift as the faceless collectivity is conventionally associated with women and individuality with men. Interestingly, some of these women artists have spoken of torture and suppression by their male partners, or male members of their society, but comparatively little of this aspect of their lives has figured in their work. Besides Ganga Devi, who in a series of paintings related to her cancer years depicts herself as a lonely woman, discarded by her husband, suffering alone in a cold hospital bed, a group of rural women practising embroidery and applique work in Bihar have produced panels depicting dowry deaths, women's domestic torture, rape, etc. However, most of the women artist's works are still imbedded in a sort of 'natural' expression of women in terms of women's aesthetics rarely questioning women's social confinement and politics of their subordination by men or not seeking their own group identity or social criticism. Mass production and commodification of their craft by the rural women come to them as a condition as their families are dependent on the income from their work. This constraint is rarely faced by the urban women artists. It is here that their work differs from that of the high-profile, middle class urban women artists. The urban women artist's resurgence has much to do with their privileged urban position (educational/economic), but the fact that the rural women artists have begun to talk about their suppression and contest their confinement at least by continuing their artistic practice, despite their severe economic dependence on men, and have begun to express their predicament in their work (which is often different in terms of production of meaning from that of their urban counterpart as will be seen in the stories of Ganga Devi and other women artists discussed later on) is in itself a remarkable phenomenon.

As there is no one homogeneous type of Indian woman, there cannot be one type of Indian woman artist. In this article therefore, I shall talk about the varied roles that village women played in the sphere of arts and crafts in different cultural and individual contexts. Women of most communities of Kutch, Gujarat, have been traditionally practicing embroidery as domestic craft for home consumption for centuries but with its increased popularity in the urban markets they have become instrumental in bringing about an economic revolution in many pockets of the district. Kutchy women's economic independence attained through their art has a substantial impact on their social and personal empowerment.

In the early years of the post-Independence era in Bihar, frequently drought-affected Bihar, the government used to distribute food grains and cash to women as a drought-relief measure instead of unproductive labour of breaking stone. In the early 1960s, under the advice of Indira Gandhi, this mindless practice was stopped and the women of Mithila were provided with sheets of paper to paint on. These paintings found their way to urban markets, where they became highly popular. In this manner their art brought about a degree of economic independence to the Maithil women. As there was in existence an elaborate tradition of women's ritual wall painting in this area, the women of Mithila treated the arrival of paper as a great opportunity for individual artistic expression. An immense creative revolution resulted from this phenomenon, making the Mithila genre of painting world-renowned. Women artists such as Ganga Devi, Sita Devi, Baua Devi, Godavari Dutta and several others emerged as great artists of this 'modernised' tradition.

The Warli tribal women of Maharashtra, too, received paper from the Government in the 1960s to expand their field of expression from wall to paper. But here things took a different turn. Women continued with their conventional ritual wall painting while their men began to appropriate the women's art and brought it to a great creative fruition. The renowned Warli painter Jivya Soma Mashe, as a three-year old orphan learnt painting while assisting the women painters of his village and as he grew up, he liberated the art form from the fixed space of the wall and the ritual-bound themes of painting by creating individualistic works on paper – a direction continuously being explored by a number of male and female Warli artists.[7]

Unlike in most other parts of India, in the northeastern states, weaving has been women's occupation. Since they produced all material for their clothing needs at home, they remained self-sufficient on this front. Since they did not produce for marketing, they did not figure in the balance sheet of progress as self-sufficiency has little economic value in the framework of market economy. In Manipur, some of the finest pottery is produced by women who, by convention, do not use the potter's wheel. In most parts of India the Hindu Prajapati potters do not allow women to touch the potter's wheel on the ground of religious belief.[8] Despite this constraint, women potters make coiled pottery and terracotta figurines, which express their creative vision and fulfil a large sector of the market demand.

In most regions of India the traditions of making floor-paintings in front of the entrance to the house to ritually purify the polluted space and to serve as platforms for ritual installations of deities and sacred objects are the women's domain. *Kolam* diagrams of Tamil Nadu and Kerala, *rangoli* of Maharashtra, *mandana* of Rajasthan, *aripan* of Bihar, *alpona* of

Bengal and *aipan* of Kumaon belong to these traditions. These austere diagrammatic paintings are done afresh every day or on every ritual occasion, and the sheer repetitive practice has imparted a degree of refinement and spontaneity to the art form charged by magical properties connected with the women's vows and rituals.

Mirror-studded clay-relief work of the desert areas of Gujarat and Rajasthan, the painted clay-relief work of the Sarguja district of Chhattisgarh and the Mandala districts of Madhya Pradesh, and similar traditions of clay and cowdung plaster and relief work elsewhere in India are exclusively practised by women.

In the context of ancient or living traditions of folk and tribal art of India, there exists a long perpetuated cliché that these are products of collective tradition and that individuality of expression – a higher form of art – is typical only of the urban, elite artists. This predilection is applied even more acutely to women artists. If one would look around without such a preconception and with an open mind, one is definite to find both in history and in the contemporary rural art practices a number of artists who have distinguished themselves by their individualistic work. Besides, several individual sculptors and architects mentioned in ancient and medieval inscriptions, names of renowned Pahari, Rajput and Mughal artists such as Nainsukh, Manaku, Nihal Chand, Sahibdin and Mansur are well known.[9]

Similarly, several contemporary folk and tribal women artists have carved a niche for themselves by challenging their constraining social situations and creating works of art charged by their desire for individual expression, often exploring the new materials, techniques and visual vocabulary, while simultaneously re-interpreting their own inherited tradition. To understand some of the processes of work at play in the situation of collective tradition and individual expression, I shall discuss at length three cases of contemporary folk women artists, but with a remark that the phenomenon of individual expression is and has always been an integral part of the so-called collective tradition. The cases that I discuss here are of those women artists whose works are distinguished not only as fine works of art, but as works of artists who are women, as works representative of their predicament and their anguish.

GANGA DEVI[10]

As in the case of most Kayasth women painters of Mithila of her generation, Ganga Devi's early artistic expressions were confined to painting the walls of the *kohbar-ghar* or bride's wedding chamber, to *aripan* or ritual floor paintings and to the five sheets of paper for wrapping *sindur*, or vermilion, conventionally sent to the bride by the bridegroom. The entire tradition of Mithila painting, of which the finest and most elaborate part is the Kayasth tradition, is rooted in these ritual paintings made on walls, floors and wrappers. The outburst of Mithila painting on paper is a later development. With the large-scale introduction of paper, the artists of Mithila continued to derive the essence of their pictorial expression from age-old cultural traditions, but also, discovered an unprecedented freedom from the confines of pre-determined religious iconography and the highly formalised geometric symbolism of ritual wall and floor paintings. From this great upheaval several individual painters emerged whose works showed signs of "a radical departure within the context of their own tradition". Ganga Devi is one of these artists.

Ganga Devi's capability to transform experience into pictorial images – ritualistic, symbolic, iconographic or narrative – made her a unique painter. In other words her qualities are such that irrespective of the subject matter – traditional *kohbar* of Mithila or her recent impressions of a visit to America – the level of image formation and pictorial transformation remains steady. Her concern is characterised by an effort to create a series of refined and conceptualised images, all filtered through her creative vision and sensibility. Her paintings possess a stylistic certitude, which is undeterred by the varied nature of themes she chose to paint. As we shall see, this purity of perception, conceptualisation and depiction makes her a great individual artist stemming from the collective tradition of Mithila painting.

Ganga Devi's evolution as an artist is deeply connected with the socio-cultural norms of the Kayasth caste to which she belonged, but more important in her development were a series of agonising events in her personal life which led her to seek solace in art.

A few years after her marriage, and in the face of poverty and childlessness, her husband married another woman and virtually threw Ganga Devi out on the street. In order to earn her livelihood and to divert her attention from this personal tragedy, she began to paint, only to be exploited by a fellow painter and childhood friend who marketed her paintings under her own name, and paid Ganga Devi a pittance despite the large profit she herself earned from them. Nevertheless by the sheer quality of her work, Ganga Devi carved a niche for herself at the very top of the art world of India. In the course of time she earned much fame and some money, but before she could savour any of these she fell victim of cancer which, combined with a head injury, took her life in 1991.

Each turn in her life sharpened Ganga Devi's perception, and provided her with a profound understanding of the human world and its manifestations. Above all, she learned to retreat from time to time into the world of her pictorial imagination defined by her well-controlled line and a fine sense of spatial organisation. Her chaotic life and the harmonious world of her painting are intrinsically related. In her personal life there was an all-round invasion and encroachment; but, as if to cope with this, in her painting each character, each image, is provided with its own breathing space. Her inner turmoil led her to create, at least on canvas, a world full of peace and order.

Ganga Devi was born around 1928 in Chatara village of Madhubani district of Bihar. Her father was a well-to-do *zamindar*. Her mother was a deeply religious woman endowed with a fine talent for painting.

Ganga Devi's life centred on the *panchanga*, the traditional lunar calendar of Mithila, comprising 12 months each of 30 days. The month, divided into two halves of 15 days, each beginning with the full moon and the new moon respectively, was the basic unit of the annual ritual cycle. Two months formed a season. The year had six seasons. The ritual significance of each day, on account of the position of the moon, the movement of the sun and the planets, the cycle of seasons and the religious festivals, was described in minutest details in the *panchanga* calendar.

Among the Kayasths it was customary for women to learn reading and writing from childhood. Ganga Devi learnt the alphabet so as to be able to read the *panchanga*: "So that I could lead my life, by correct *achara* and *vichara* or purity of action and thought".

The women of Mithila kept *vratas* or vows and observed fasts on some of these ritually important days. Every month had at least one sacred day on which *aripan*, women's ritual floor paintings, were made by using rice paste for pigment and a twig for a brush.

Specific floor paintings were also made to mark each of the *samskara*, or important stages of human life, such as conception, birth, the sixth day rites after birth, the child's tonsure ceremony, initiation into learning, puberty, betrothal and marriage.

The beginnings of Ganga Devi's paintings are rooted in these floor paintings. Her concern for ritual purity in everyday life was responsible for the iconographic perfection of her earlier work, and the symbolic overtones of her imagery highly characteristic of her later paintings.

The word *aripan* stems from the Sanskrit *alepana* which derives from the root *lip*, meaning 'to smear', and therefore basically refers to ritual smearing of the ground with cowdung and clay as prescribed in most of the ancient ritual handbooks, and as is practised by a large number of village and tribal communities of India even today.

Another important mode of pictorial expression that occupied Ganga Devi in her formative years was that of painting the cowdung plastered walls of the *kohbar-ghar*, the bride's wedding chamber, where marriage is solemnised under the auspicious influence of the painted symbols of plenty and fertility. From her explanation of each motif and symbol of the collective *kohbar* painting, it becomes clear that she understood *kohbar* not as mere 'festive decoration', but as pictorial reconstruction and synthesisation of the magico-religious world comprising painted images of deities, sacred trees, primordial creatures, symbols of fertility, ritual accessories, heavenly bodies, the male and the female, etc. with forms ranging from representational-narrative to purely abstract-symbolic to geometric-diagrammatic. The entire *kohbar* painting is understood by her as a magical edifice in which each image, each symbol is to be conceptualised with utmost purity of essence and form. As she once said "impure expression leads to self-destruction". By "self-destruction" she means destruction due to magical ill effect as much as the violation of her artistic self. In this context the 'magical' content cannot be separated from the 'artistic'.

These perceptions, which crystallised in the early stage of her career and in the context of ritual wall and floor paintings, continued to pervade her later works even in the context of purely secular themes, as in her 'American series'. The concern for magical purity became transformed into the purity of expression.

The second important phase of Ganga Devi's painting began when, discarded by her husband on the eve of his second marriage, painting appeared to be the only means of earning a livelihood. Around this time there was a drought in Bihar and the government had been tackling the problem of providing work for the drought-stricken people of Mithila by encouraging them to paint on paper supplied to them for the purpose. The personal need for survival and the change of medium from wall to paper offered her a great challenge. Being a fine artist, she immediately realised the advantage of the smoother surface of paper over the rough plaster of the wall, for it allowed her to discover the potentiality of fine line especially for rendering narrative themes from the sacred legends of Rama and Krishna, the epic heroes.

Yves Vequaud, a French writer and journalist, had by now 'discovered' the talent of Ganga Devi.[11] He exposed her work in Delhi which eventually got the All India Handicrafts Board interested in her work. Ganga Devi was encouraged to make a painting for consideration of the National Award. She needed a peaceful space to begin this work. One Misra offered a space in his house to paint and to live with his family. Her husband, who had practically relinquished her and was living with his new younger wife, began to protest over her going to live and work in another's house. Ganga Devi recollects:

> Around this time a thought was given to consider me for a National Award. Misra Sahib of the Madhubani Office obtained a large sheet of paper and asked me to paint on it. I told him that I had no place to sit and paint. There was no peace at home. Misraji[12] invited me to stay in his house and paint there. On this, my husband's brother said: 'You have got our nose and ears chopped', (downgraded the family's honour by staying in another man's house). My husband said: 'I will tear the paper to pieces.' They said they would not allow me to go to Madhubani and live with Misra Sahib's family. Badridas, my sister's relative, intervened and I just left for Madhubani. Misra Sahib and his wife were very kind to me. ... I painted day and night. My husband knew this much, that I was not a woman of bad character. My co-wife was also quiet after she learnt that I had a grant of Rs. 1500.

The introduction of paper brought her twofold liberation. She was no longer confined to painting *kohbar* and *aripan* with their limited vocabulary of symbols and images, and she could now investigate the unlimited possibility of drawing in fine line. One outcome of the innovation was the series of paintings based on mythological subjects.

As a devotee, she had known the story of Rama, and as a woman banished by her husband for no fault of her own, she had experienced the agony of Sita. But for the first time in her life, she attempted pictorial conceptualization of the story of Rama and Sita.

In this new situation, which marks the second phase of her painting career, Ganga Devi was faced with handling the problems of perspective or depicting the three-dimensional surface, converting the temporal sequence of the narrative into a spatial situation and translating the mythical images into pictorial ones.

She solved the problems of perspective by eliminating the depth-dimension totally. Realising the true nature of painting to be two dimensional she did not attempt to fake the third dimension by means of shading, or by overlapping images to indicate depth; each character, each object, each leaf, flower or blade of grass, was provided with its own free space. These aperspectival pictorial depictions make her work appear 'unfamiliar' and therefore highly individualistic.

The problem of converting the temporal sequence of the legend into the spatial one, at this early stage, has been tackled by her in a rather simplistic manner. She divided the space into various squares or rectangular compartments by means of cross-bands, in the manner of a comic strip, in which each compartment contained a complete painting reflecting tremendous pictorial narrative qualities. Spaces between the characters were filled up with flowers, branches and creepers, growing from nowhere. Ganga Devi eliminates all indication of sky or earth, time and space, instantaneously imparting a mythological quality to the painting. Each picture with its ornate frame, the characters focused in action and dialogue, minimal indication of mountains, rivers or forests, looked more like a scene from the Ramleela, the traditional folk theatre of Northern India which was the main source of pictorial inspiration behind these paintings. Flimsy looking crowns, halos, bows and arrows, and 'cardboard' chariots with lotus-shaped wheels, further testify that this phase of her work derived much from the Ramleela theatre.

Ganga Devi's third significant phase of painting began in 1982 with her epic work entitled *The Cycle of Life*. With this painting she truly crossed the threshold of convention to excavate fresh grounds hitherto untouched by any painter from the Mithila tradition or by herself. The theme she chose to paint, the *Cycle of Life*, comprised a series of *samskaras* or ritual events of initiation as practised in Madhubani. For the first time she painted a theme related to everyday life and the immediate human surrounding. This offered a departure and a challenge. This being unprecedented both in her work and in Madhubani tradition, she had to dive deep into the ocean of her imagination to find a new pictorial vocabulary. The results were startlingly fresh and original.

Her images in *kohbar* and *aripan* floor paintings were constructed within the prescribed iconography of these magical paintings. Her Ramayana series derived its imagery heavily from scenes of the theatrical performances of Ramleela as well as from the popular local version of the Ramcharitmanas of Tulsidasa.

But in the case of the *Cycle of Life* she was faced with the problem of depicting the entire story of human life as a continuous narrative in which each image, each scene and each sequence, was conceived afresh without any reference to a pre-existing model in her own tradition. The painting was conceived on an epic scale, replete with rich cultural details pertaining to social manners and customs, and religious beliefs. Here she eliminated the compartmentalisation of scenes as in her earlier Ramayana series. The resultant effect was that of a universe teeming with scores of people, trees, birds, animals – all a part of a great celebration of life – from one birth to the next.

The entire cycle of life has been rendered in 24 scenes, each marking a significant event in the process of being born and growing up in Mithila. The single most striking feature of this painting is the highly individualistic conceptualisation of images and strict adherence to the ritual-symbolic conventions of the collective culture of Madhubani. These images owe very little to 'other pictures', but stem from a mind searching for a new vocabulary of self-expression to suit the challenging new subject matter. The human images here are much more real and spontaneous than in her earlier mythological paintings of the Ramayana, reflecting on their faces and their postures earthy sentiments. The temporal dimension of *The Cycle of Life* unscrolls horizontally to encompass a multitude of images in a double interaction of time and space.

Ganga Devi's poetic imagery blends beautifully with a plethora of symbolic, magical and natural detail rendered in the interstices between the figures and scenes. A young woman, with flaming hair and an ocean-like aura of fine streams of water, stands on a painted magical diagram representing the female organ smeared with menstrual blood, being given a ritual bath on attainment of puberty. A pregnant mother lies on the ground holding a bunch of mangoes to safeguard her fertility and the child inside her womb anxious to be born, and prays with folded hands: "O God, release me from this hell". Two women help to deliver and cut the umbilical cord, while the newly born child lies on freshly harvested paddy stocks and a pair of parrots make love in the air, indicating genesis. These are immortal images that could have stemmed only from Ganga Devi's great individual perceptions of her collective cultural tradition and her personal artistic capability, unique in the entire Mithila tradition.

In 1985 Ganga Devi visited the United States of America to participate in an exhibition of Indian folk art and culture in Washington. She did not remain aloof to this *doosara hi duniya* (completely different world) but confronted it with a series of paintings based on her American experience which I shall call her 'American Series'. She did these in the two years after her return from the USA. She recalled images from her memory of the visual experience of America. The images here were not as exuberant as those of *The Cycle of Life*, but were more in the nature of minimal graphic symbols. In her Washington Monument, for the first time using a narrative situation, she approached the canvas, as a free pictorial space not dividing it up into linear compartments or rows in which sequences are chronologically organised. In the centre of the painting is the 'Washington Monument' surrounded by American flags. The tower and the crossways leading to it automatically divide the painting into four rectangles. The scenes depicted are derived from her memory of the "Festival of American Folk Life" celebrated annually at the Mall around the fourth of July. The imagery comprising multi-storied motor cars with lotus wheels (the latter resembling the wheels of chariots in her Ramayana series); a hand coming out of a window handing over a ticket to climb up the Monument; pedestrians carrying flowers and prominent shopping bags; people wearing half-American, half-Indian costumes – all rendered in Mithila style – gives the painting a surrealistic quality, as if an American dream painted on a transparent celluloid sheet had been super-imposed upon a distant Madhubani landscape.

Another painting of this series is based on her recollection of a ride in a roller coaster in America. The gravity railroad, having a train with open cars that moves along a high, sharply winding trestle built with stepped inclines producing sudden speedy plunges for thrill, must have been a unique experience to result into such a graphic pictorial expression. The neat drawing of the trestle, the way the heads of passengers rise above the open cars, the way two passengers try to balance while getting on to the train standing below and the contrast to the passengers in the train speedily climbing a steep slope above results from her great faculty of observation of detail and its pictorialisation to minimum graphic images.

Ganga Devi had learnt to eliminate formal context in her mythological paintings based on Ramayana. She achieved this by avoiding any definite pictorial reference to worldly settings or a known landscape. Paintings of this series were twice removed from reality (suitable for mythological themes) – the first time because of her own interpretation and conceptualisation of the themes and images, and the second time due to inspiration from the visual aspects of the traditional theatrical performances of Ramleela which by themselves were visual conceptualisations of the narrative.

Thus, in the Ramayana painting, in a way, she 'mythologised' the mythology. But in her 'American Series' what she did was something even more brilliant – she mythologised the 'reality'. She attempted to transform the day-to-day images of motor cars, flags, ticket-booths, roller coasters, people carrying shopping bags, into completely imaginary and 'fantastic' objects. She removed them again from any recognisable formal context and stripped them of all their 'familiarity' as common objects of everyday life.

What better course can the work of an Indian painter of Ganga Devi's calibre, truly rooted in the rich tradition of magic, ritual and mythological, take after a sudden exposure to a 'completely new world' if not come a full circle at another plane of artistic awareness!

In mid-1987 Ganga Devi was struck by cancer. From September 1987 till her death on 21 January 1991, she stayed mostly at the Crafts Museum, New Delhi, except for a few weeks at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences for treatment of her illness, two trips of 15 days and three months, respectively, to Japan and a two-months' stay in Rasidpur, Madhubani. During this period, she did four autobiographical paintings narrating her experience of contracting cancer and its treatment. The most unique feature of these paintings is that Ganga Devi herself, the principal character in the narrative, appears repeatedly. This may perhaps be the only example of autobiographical paintings done by any artist belonging to the tribal or rural traditions of India. In the first of the series of these paintings, Ganga Devi deals with the episode of her having fallen into the hands of a quack in Madhubani.

The second one pertains to Ganga Devi's visit to her village Chatara, to meet her brothers before proceeding to Delhi for treatment. On reaching Chatara she was faced with the sudden death of her elder brother, leading to the postponement of her visit to Delhi.

The third painting relates to Ganga Devi's long and tedious journey from Chatara to Madhubani, and from there to Delhi via Patna amidst heavy rain and floods.

The last one of the series depicts Ganga Devi's arrival in Delhi and her treatment at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences.

During her prolonged illness, Ganga Devi had to often lie flat on her back, either when she went for medical check-ups or when she was periodically hospitalized. Such situations conditioned her to stare at the ceiling of the hospital room for hours on end. In these moments of utter loneliness she saw ceiling fans and the typical hospital lights. These two objects – her constant companions at a time of prolonged pain – finally became the symbols of boundless agony and unending boredom. They are prominently depicted in several registers of her 'Cancer Series' of painting. The doctor's handbag, spittoons placed under the patient's beds, temperature charts hanging on the walls and the painful moments of being given injections or blood transfusions, or measuring blood pressure had become a part of Ganga Devi's life during these years and have found obvious expression in this series of her paintings.

In 'The Cancer Series', Ganga Devi takes to story-telling, selecting for depiction only those incidents of her cancer days which had deeply affected her, whether as a consequence of the sheer physical pain caused by the disease or those situations which were imposed upon her by her social circumstances and the calamities of nature. She looks at the entire sequence of events from outside: an artist seeing herself as the principal character in the drama of her own life. It is interesting that Ganga Devi established the typology of her own image in the first painting of the series as a young married woman wearing a prominent *tika* on her forehead as a sign that her husband is alive; a mole on her forehead, chin and two hands; wearing intricately patterned saris and elaborate necklaces, wristlets and anklets, an idealised image of herself as a young, beautiful woman. Once the type was cast, she used this recognisable image of herself as a character in the slowly unfolding narrative of her life.

It is also a remarkable feature of Mithila painting that all male and female characters are invariably shown in their youth, Ganga Devi's own portraiture being no exception. One reason for this is that the pictorial typology of the male and female figures was modelled on that of gods and goddesses who were supposed to be perpetually youthful.

SONABAI

Most writing on Indian art of the last few decades concentrates on the overwhelming presence of a self-perpetuating collective tradition, continuing unchanged for centuries. This writing pays scant attention to individual artistic innovation and expression. It rarely recognises that tradition is a living, growing and changing entity which, though it shapes artists, is itself then shaped by the unique direction they give it.

For 60 years Sonabai has made painted clay-relief panels and figures as a part of the inimitable world of her imagination created by her to keep her company in times of loneliness. This is a phenomenon one cannot comprehend within the straightjacket categories of 'tradition' or 'individualism'. Her case is that of an innovative and sensitive individual artist learning from her inherited artistic conventions and surpassing them to attain a level of artistic expression, so unique and powerful, that it gives new direction to the traditions of her community. In other words, her work does not merely derive from the inherited tradition but shapes it – gives it a new orientation. For this reason she is recognized as a master and is a representative of a historical process, which is shaped by such individuals.

RAJWARS AND THE TRADITIONS OF THEIR ART

Sonabai belongs to the Rajwar community of Sarguja. Rajwars are a cultivating caste of Bihar and Chhattisgarh. There is a large Rajwar population in the Sarguja District of Chhattisgarh. In Phuhputra village, to which Sonabai belongs, there are about 300 Rajwar families. In the entire Bilaspur–Ambikapur region, Rajwars are the main farming community. Rajwars worship local Hindu village gods as well as dead ancestors. They observe Hindu festivals such as Holi, Diwali and Dussehra but their most important festival known as *chherta*, is celebrated on the full-moon day of the lunar month of *pus* (December). On this post-harvest festival all Rajwar houses are freshly repaired, whitewashed and elaborately adorned with wall paintings and clay-relief work. The origin of the art of painting and clay relief work of Rajwars is intrinsically connected with this festival. Every woman of the village endeavours to make her house appear more attractive than that of her neighbour.

An average Rajwar house is a single-storeyed structure having a central inner courtyard, which is open to the sky. This square or rectangular courtyard is surrounded by semi-covered verandas. Behind these verandas are the rooms. Between the open courtyard and the verandas there are usually perforated screens made of bamboo and wood structures covered with clay. These verandas, bright and airy, are the main living spaces where almost all the daytime routine activities – cooking, eating, afternoon nap, receiving guests – are conducted. The verandas are also the galleries for paintings, clay figures, relief work and ornamental screens made by the women of the house. The houses are made of thick, load bearing mud walls covered with thatched or tiled roofs. The walls need to be frequently repaired or fully replaced every ten to fifteen years. The outer as well as most of the inner walls of the house are usually covered with a final coating of clay and cowdung over which the women apply a layer of *chhui mitti* (white clay) soaked in water. When the layer is still wet, they draw parallel, lateral, straight or wavy lines with their fingers, swiftly moving in different directions.[11] After Sonabai's pioneering work of adorning her house with innumerable painted clay figures, relief-work panels and decorative screens, the Rajwar women of Sarguja have revived and developed this tradition with exuberance. Earlier on there was a minor tradition of painted clay work which was confined to making *jhinjhira*, or screen work; *detha*, or niches; *patani*, or shelves, and *dodki*, rice-storage jars which were placed in the corners of a room. Even the large, unhusked paddy storage compartments kept in the chamber adjacent to the kitchen were bereft of any ornamentation. Sonabai built a great edifice of this art form through her individual talent, on the meagre foundation of the rudimentary tradition of making *patani*, or shelves and *dodki*, storage jars.

SONABAI AND THE WORLD OF HER 'COMPANIONS'

Some of the early circumstances of Sonabai's personal life have a significant bearing on her magnificent artistic achievements and therefore it would not be out of place to briefly refer to them here. Sonabai was born around 1930 (according to her 45-year-old son, his mother might be 67 years now) in Kenapara, a predominantly Rajwar village situated in Ambikapur *tehsil* of Sarguja district. She had no formal education, as it was not customary then for Rajwar girls to go to school. As a child she routinely assisted her mother in her household work including painting the house or making ornamental clay work. But she categorically mentions that she did not learn her art from her mother or from anyone else. When she was about 12 years old, she was married to Holiram of Puhphutara village (about four kilometres from her parental village) as his second wife. Holiram, a wealthy land-owning farmer, was already married once, but since his first wife did not bear a child, he married Sonabai in the hope of begetting a male offspring. After about 10 years of marriage, Sonabai bore a son who was named Daroga Ram. Around this time, the husband's joint family, comprising his two married brothers, split. The family property of about 15 acres of land was divided between the brothers. Sonabai moved into her new house. She reminisces:

> It was a large house, my son was small, my husband was away the whole day and I was terribly lonely. I had no one to talk to. To occupy myself and to have company, I began to construct clay figures of human beings, deities, birds and animals all over the house. They became my companions.

Sonabai remembers that she would get so engrossed in creating clay images for hours that often she would not remember to take a break for lunch. To this her husband would always say: "You are all the time busy with clay, can you eat clay?" Sonabai would retort: "Yes, I can eat clay or I need not eat at all, it is not your problem." Her husband did not express any particular admiration for her work but he let her do what she wanted to do. She had a great dislike for routine domestic work such as pounding rice, grinding wheat, cooking or tending cattle and her husband did not insist on her performing these tasks.

When the house was filled with clay figures – of musicians, dancers, couples swinging on the aerial roots of the Banyan tree, the flute-playing Krishna accompanied by Radha, a bridegroom riding a donkey-like horse, monkeys jumping around, bulls and buffaloes locking horns in a fight, goats resting under a tree, a cat sitting on a parapet about to leap, flowering creepers, lotus plants, a variety of birds, snakes and other creatures – the neighbours became curious. Some admired her, some scoffed at her and others remained indifferent. None of these responses deterred Sonabai from her conviction and attachment to her work. When Bharat Bhavan was being set up, several artists and researchers travelled to distant villages of Madhya Pradesh in search of folk and tribal arts. When they encountered Sonabai's house, they were wonderstruck. Sonabai recollects:

> When they said they wanted to take one of the perforated screens from my house to Bhopal so that the whole country could admire my work, my throat choked. They were nice people, they had stayed in my house – had given me so much honour. I could not refuse, but when the screen was removed, I could not hold back my tears.[14]

According to Sonabai, her creations had little impact on the women of the rest of the community until when she was 'discovered' by Bharat Bhavan, a modern multi-arts complex situated in Bhopal, and was honoured by the President's National Award for craftspersons in 1983 and the *Tulsi Samman* of the Madhya Pradesh Government in 1986. With the coming of money and recognition, other women of the locality began to imitate Sonabai in adorning their own homes. Everyone said: "She has converted mud into gold". The impact of Sonabai's work on the Rajwar women of her locality has been so powerful that today almost every Rajwar woman of Puhphutara and other nearby villages has turned her home into an art gallery – both following her tradition and innovating new forms. Had she been an artist of lesser creativity or weak determination, she could not have attained the status of a true master who has brought a silent artistic revolution in rural Sarguja without much media backing or institutionalised marketing.

In the context of the much-celebrated notion of anonymity of 'traditional' Indian artists, which is more of a construct than a cultural reality, the case of Sonabai is a revelation. To most of the organised art-world of India she belongs to the faceless, collective tradition of Sarguja clay work but for those within her society she was individualistic from the beginning and is recognised among them as a great creative force which has influenced the entire community. She revitalised and built upon an inherited collective tradition and thereby initiated and established her own tradition which again became a 'collective' tradition – but with a difference. These processes must have been operative in ancient India, building up the edifice of Indian art from layer upon layer of individualism and collectivity – not so simply separable from each other.

Sonabaiesque painted clay figures and relief-work panels are found amply in the Rajwar villages of Sarguja today, but a large bulk of these appear to be lifeless imitations of Sonabai's originals. In her work one can find, even today, the originator's sincerity, the warmth and conviviality for which she had created her 'companions', her private world. Though not realistic in rendering, these figures are marked by the intense naturalism of certain highly expressive postures, gestures and gazes – elements which she desired in the 'friends' whom she chose to create and brought into being. Certain images such as the *purain* lotus plant has both representational (decorative in this context) and symbolic significance. Talking about this motif she once mentioned the old Rajwar custom of burying the newly born child's umbilical cord and the hair collected after the child's tonsure ceremony on the day of Dussehra festival (October) at the root of a lotus plant growing in the village pond and pointed out the connection between fast proliferating lotus plant as a symbol of fertility and the ritual practices connected with it.

Certain stylistic features of her work such as the semi-geometric division of the human or animal figure or the angular movement of branches of her trees can be understood in terms of her technique. Her mud-covered and painted motifs usually have a core comprising a roughly shaped bundle of paddy straw or a rope. These generally stiff but partially flexible materials require to be organised more in straight lines rather than in curves, leading to the development of a certain stylistic peculiarity.

The sheer magnitude, range and innovative quality of her work pursued over a lifetime make Sonabai a highly distinguished woman artist of India.

NEELAMANI DEVI

> *The bird, though it returns to its own tree, does not recognise the branch it had perched upon earlier, similarly potsherds remain separate from the earth from which they originate, even when they return to it.*
>
> From a song sung by Neelamani Devi[15]

The case of Neelamani Devi is completely different from that of Ganga Devi or Sonabai. Neelamani comes from a community where women are the professional potters who earn their livelihood by means of their craft. As such they are not economically dependent on their men. In fact, in many a case, it is the men who are dependent on their women for their daily subsistence. There was no social restriction on practising her art in the manner she desired or presenting it outside her society and therefore she received the benefit of exposure and experimentation, which helped her to develop an individualistic idiom, quite early in her life. After she earned recognition and money, she began to face restrictions and hurdles out of envy, in her personal life, but she was able to deal with it firmly, possibly because in Manipur, women have enjoyed an old tradition of independence and revolt against suppression.

Neelamani Devi was born in 1940 in Thongjao village of Thoubal district of Manipur, in a family of traditional potters of the region. Though firmly rooted in her tradition, in terms of materials, techniques and forms of pottery, she developed an interest in creatively using the accidental smoke stains, which usually emerge in the kiln, by maneuvering them for her personal artistic expression. Neelamani Devi's work has been shown in several museums and exhibitions in India as well as in Europe, Japan and the USA. She was honoured with the National Award for Mastercraftspersons in 1986 and *Tulsi Samman* of the Madhya Pradesh Government in the same year.

The women potters of Thoubal area, to which Neelamani Devi belongs, make a unique type of pottery, which is marked by a range of visual variations. Some pots are reddish brown, some have black spots on them and some are black. When I first met Neelamani Devi, she told me about her childhood love for playing with smoke stains, which accidentally occurred inside the kiln. She talked about the tonality of mobile smoke marks, which looked like clouds, flowing water or flying birds to her. She mentioned to me how she used to get absorbed for hours interpreting the 'calligraphy' of smoke stains. She recollected how her mother used to scold her for not making stainless pots. Neelamani's obsession with smoke marks intrigued me beyond limits. In my 25-year career in folk arts and crafts, I had rarely come across a person who was interested in developing an apparently accidental effect in a work process and use it as tool/language for expression.

A deeply religious woman, Neelamani Devi firmly believes in the goddess Panthoibi. According to her, all her work is governed by Panthoibi. The composite myth of creation of mankind and of origin of pottery, as inherited from her mother is narrated by her as follows:

> In the Golden Age there was no sign of life in Manipur. Seven suns shone bright, day and night. The earth of Manipur was surrounded by nine hillocks and there was water everywhere. Atiya Kuru Shidaba and Ima Leimaren Shidabi descended from Heaven to create the world. First of all, Atiya Kuru Shidaba drained out the water towards the Southwest through a hole known as *chingnung hoot*, with the help of his trident. Koubru hill and Kangla region in the valley were among the first to dry up. Having settled down in the valley, Atiya Kuru Shidaba and Ima Leimaren Shidabi wanted to have a son to fulfil their wishes. One day they heard a heavenly thunder proclaiming: "Dig out the centre of the house facing North and offer to it prayers for seven days, then your wish will be fulfilled." After completion of seven days prayers, Ima Leimaren Shidabi found a male child of golden colour and therefore the child was named Sanamahi. The golden child Sanamahi later on shot down six extra suns (*numit kappa*) by his arrows and created various creatures dwelling in water, air and earth. Finally he created the human being. Having accomplished their task Atiya Kuru Shidaba and Ima Leimaren Shidabi prepared to disappear. Ima Leimaren Shidabi took several incarnations to carry out seven different tasks. 'Panthoibi' or Leima Leinaotabi, one among them, created the first earthen pot.[16]

A unique feature of Thoubal pottery is the contrast of texture created on the surface of the pot by using a wooden anvil having ornate patterns incised on it. When a pot is nearly shaped the potter presses the patterned anvil on the surface to get its designs impressed upon it in shallow relief. Neelamani used this conventional device with great sensitivity and involvement to demonstrate the beauty of contrast between the textured and the smooth areas of the surface.

Neelamani Devi, like most of the female potters of India, does not use the potter's wheel to turn her pots. She works with a method similar to coiled pottery. Using slabs of prepared clay, she shapes a semi-cylindrical form on a log of wood to which, at a later stage, a base is attached. Once the slabs of clay are joined together and shaped with wet hands to arrive at the basic form of a cylinder, Neelamani Devi grips its upper circular edge with a wet piece of cloth and while bending over it in that position swiftly rotates around the pot. The pressure of grip and the force of rotation allow the pot to take the desired shape, depending upon the direction in which it is pulled or pushed while rotating. A woman, conventionally not having access to potter's wheel becomes the wheel herself.

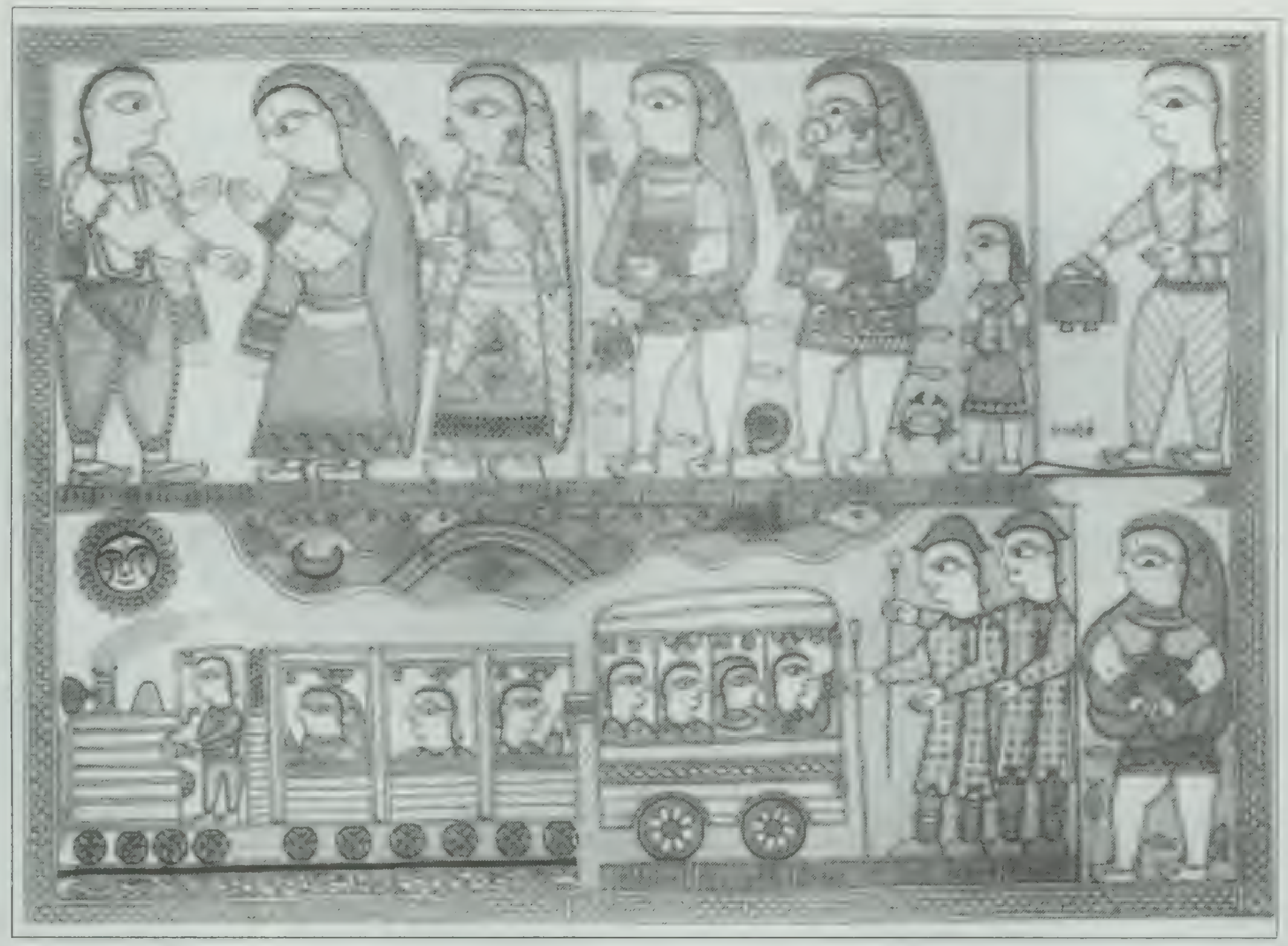
Neelamani Devi marvelously combines the technique of coiled/slab pottery involving shaping with anvil with that of 'wheel turning'. This gives her pots the unique combination of muscular build-up of its body and smooth 'skin' of its surface. Neelamani Devi's pots are like remarkable portraits of individuals whose faces stand out in crowds of faceless masses. Neelamani Devi emerges as a great individual artist in a crowd of potters who have been mechanically mass-producing pots for a lifetime, not distinguishable from one another.

I met Neelamani Devi for the first time in 1987 when she came as potter in residence to Crafts Museum, New Delhi. I was most impressed by her dignity and subtle pride that she took in her work. She told me that it was her first visit to Delhi or to any metropolitan city for that matter.

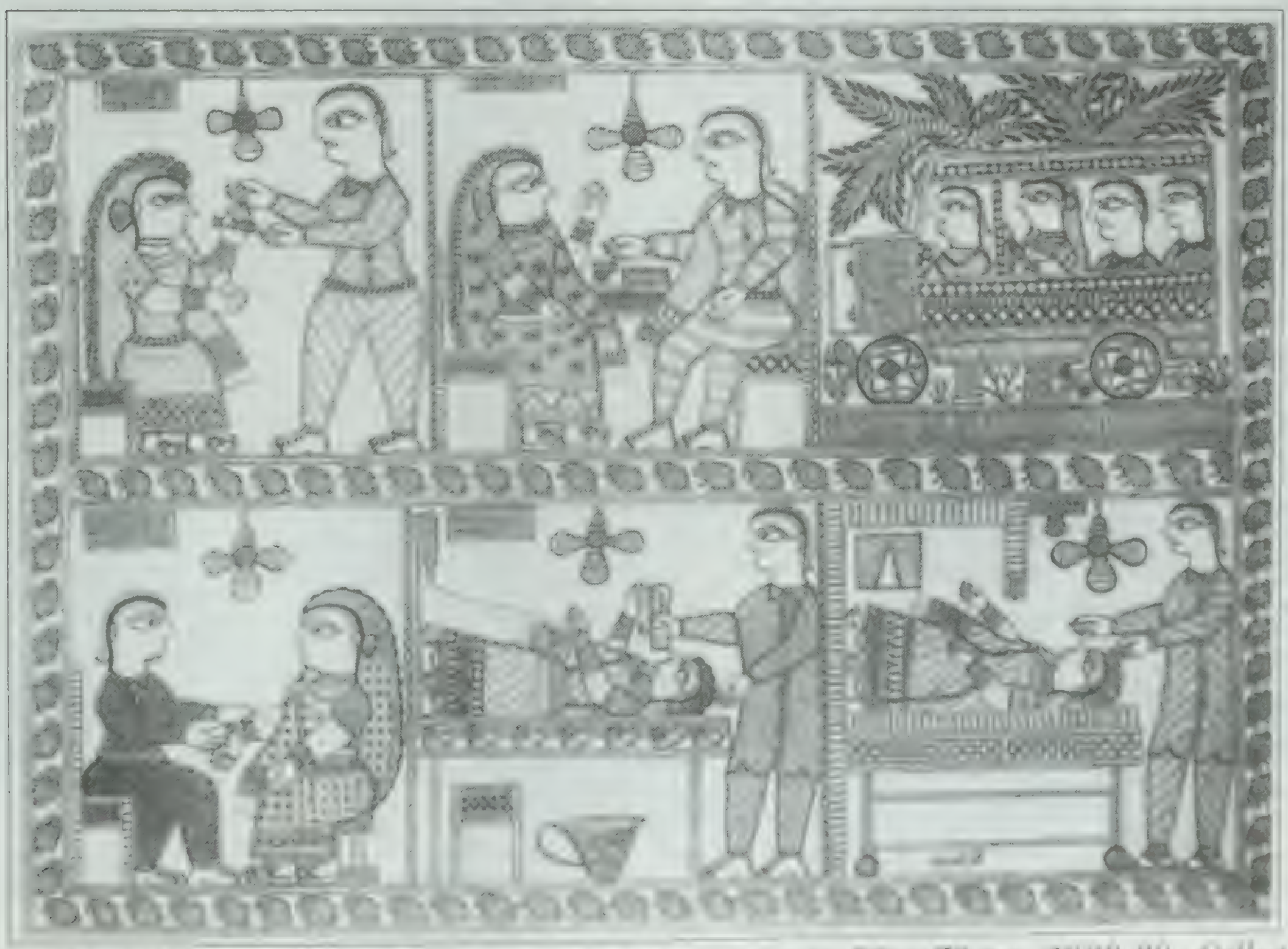
For a village woman travelling to a metropolis, as compared to women artists from other regions of India, Neelamani was full of confidence. On my asking about this complete absence of anxiety in her, she told me that in the Manipur society women enjoyed tremendous freedom and equally participated in "bread-earning" with their male counterparts. Manipur had a long tradition of exclusive markets for women, which were not only the fora for business transactions but acted as agencies for women's empowerment. Another potter from Manipur confirmed this to me and added that the famous *meira-paibi* revolt in which women as torch-bearers took out processions against the administration was an off-shoot of this tradition of women's political participation and decision making.

Though there is an old convention that only the married women engage themselves in making pottery, Neelamani, as a path-breaker, taught pottery to her teenage daughters in the 1980s, who inherited her refinement and sensitivity.

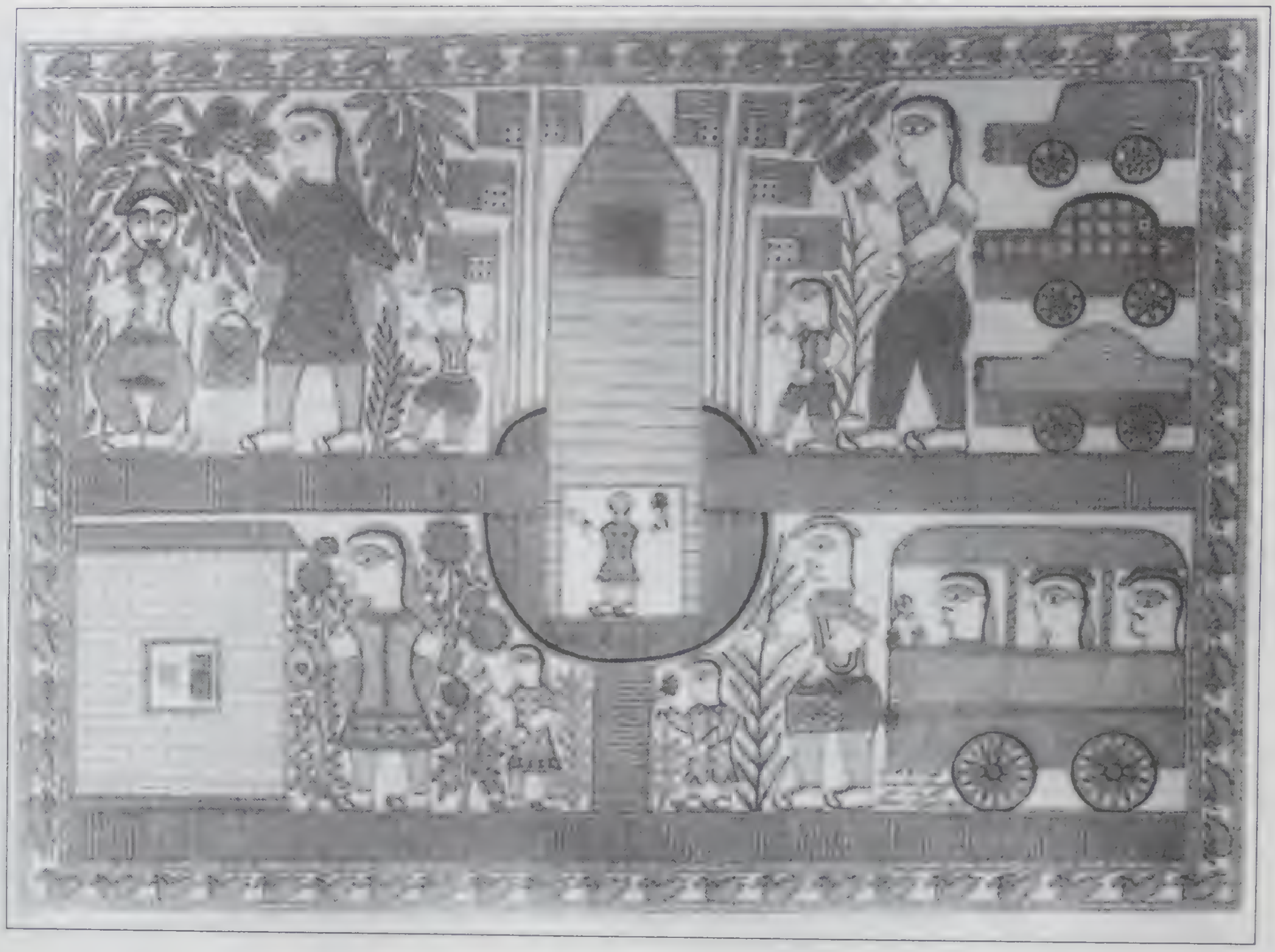
After she received the National Award for her individualistic work, Neelamani began to be invited to exhibit her craft in the Indian and international urban centres. Despite envy and resistance on the home front, she regularly participated in these events. Her greatest reward, according to her, was a three-month residency at an art institution in Japan (the home of some of the finest pottery of the world) in the mid-1990s, where she received standing ovation from groups of students and professional potters, each time she finished a pot and put it before a crowd of onlookers. She says that on such occasions she feels gratified as an artist. Undoubtedly, Neelamani Devi is singularly responsible for bringing Manipur pottery into the mainstream arts of India.



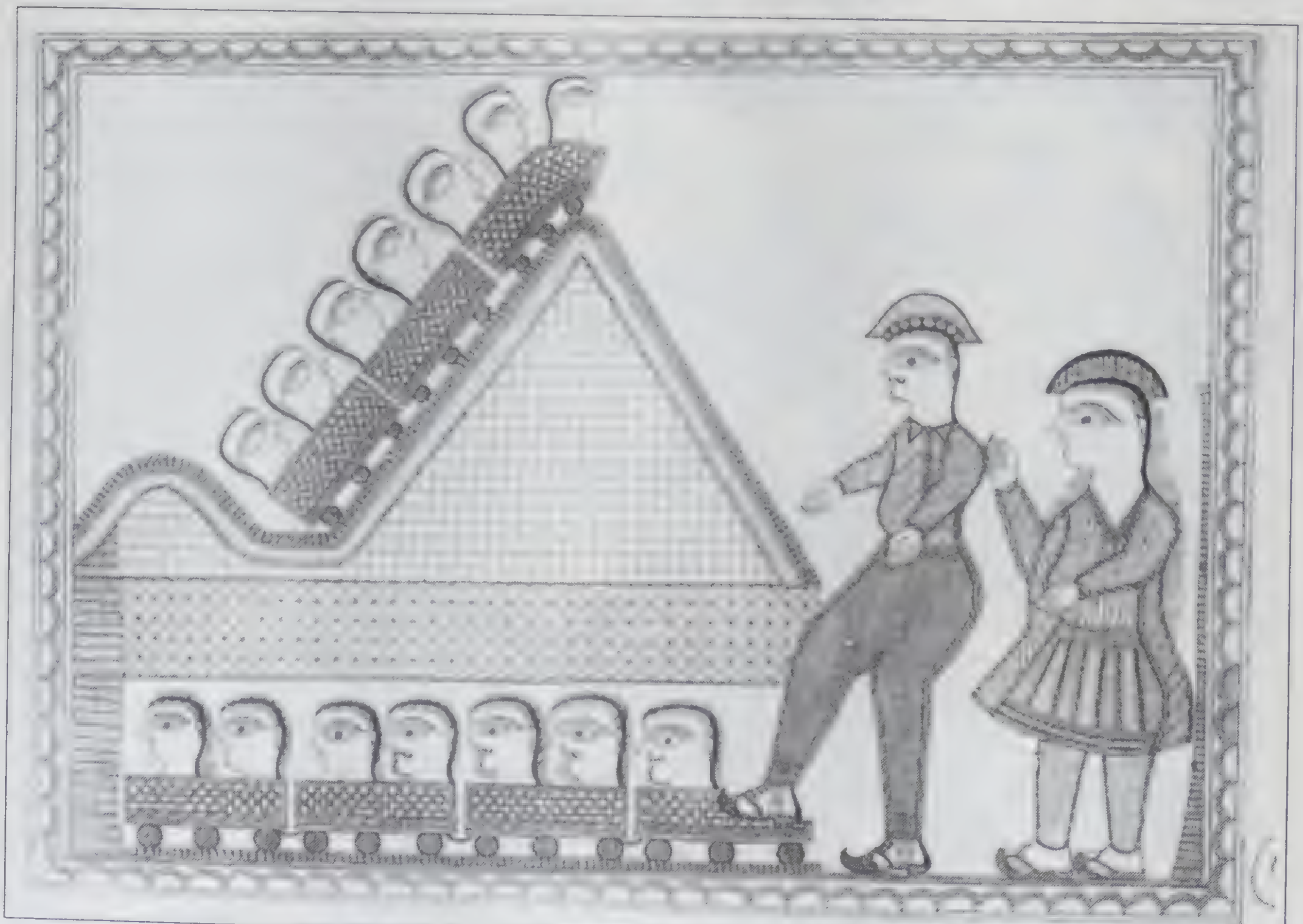
Ganga Devi, Proceeding to Delhi, Cancer Series, *inks on paper, 56 x 78 cm, 1988-89. Collection: Crafts Museum, New Delhi*



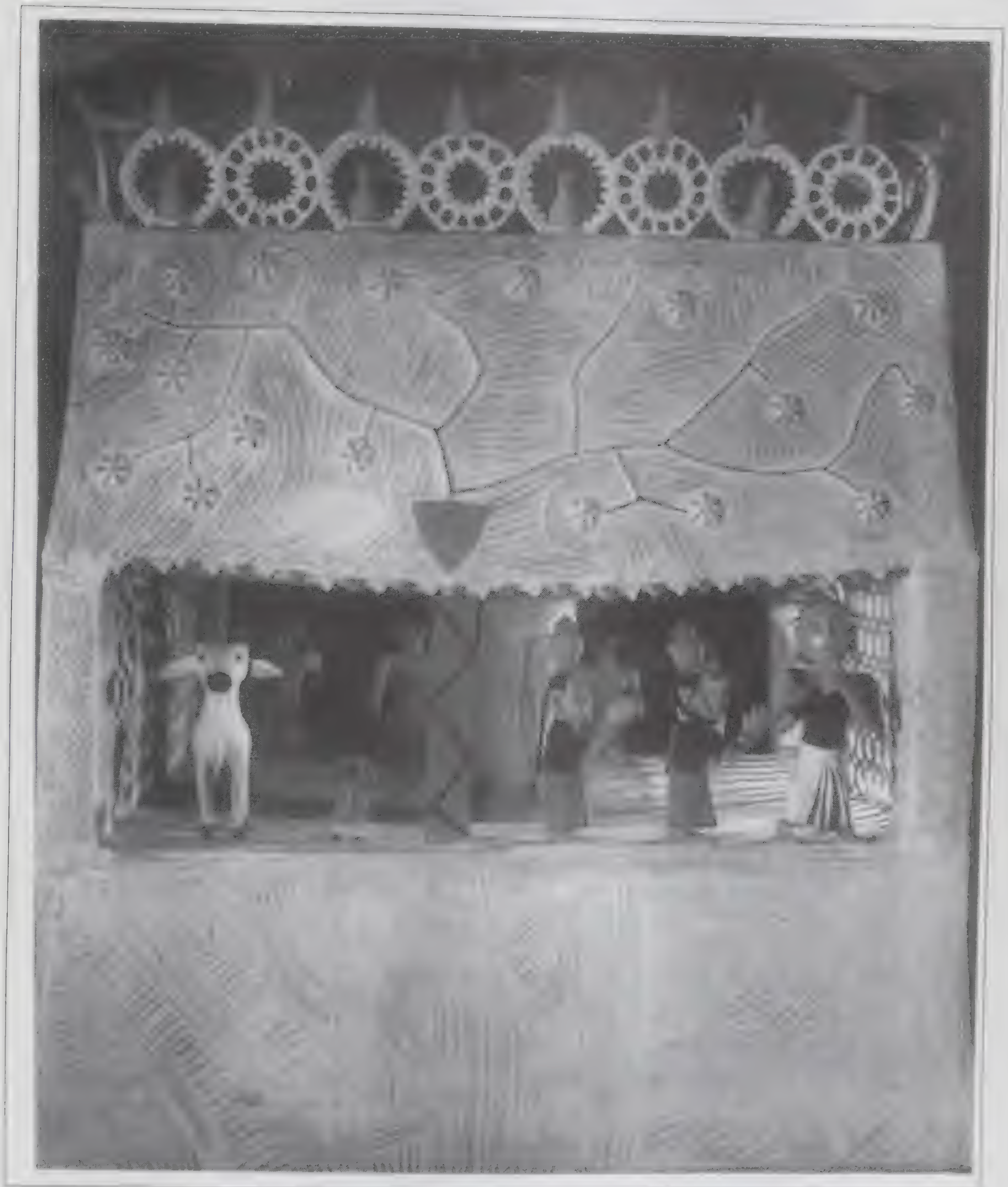
Ganga Devi: Cancer Ward, Cancer Series, *inks on paper, 56 x 78 cm, 1988-89. Collection: Crafts Museum, New Delhi*



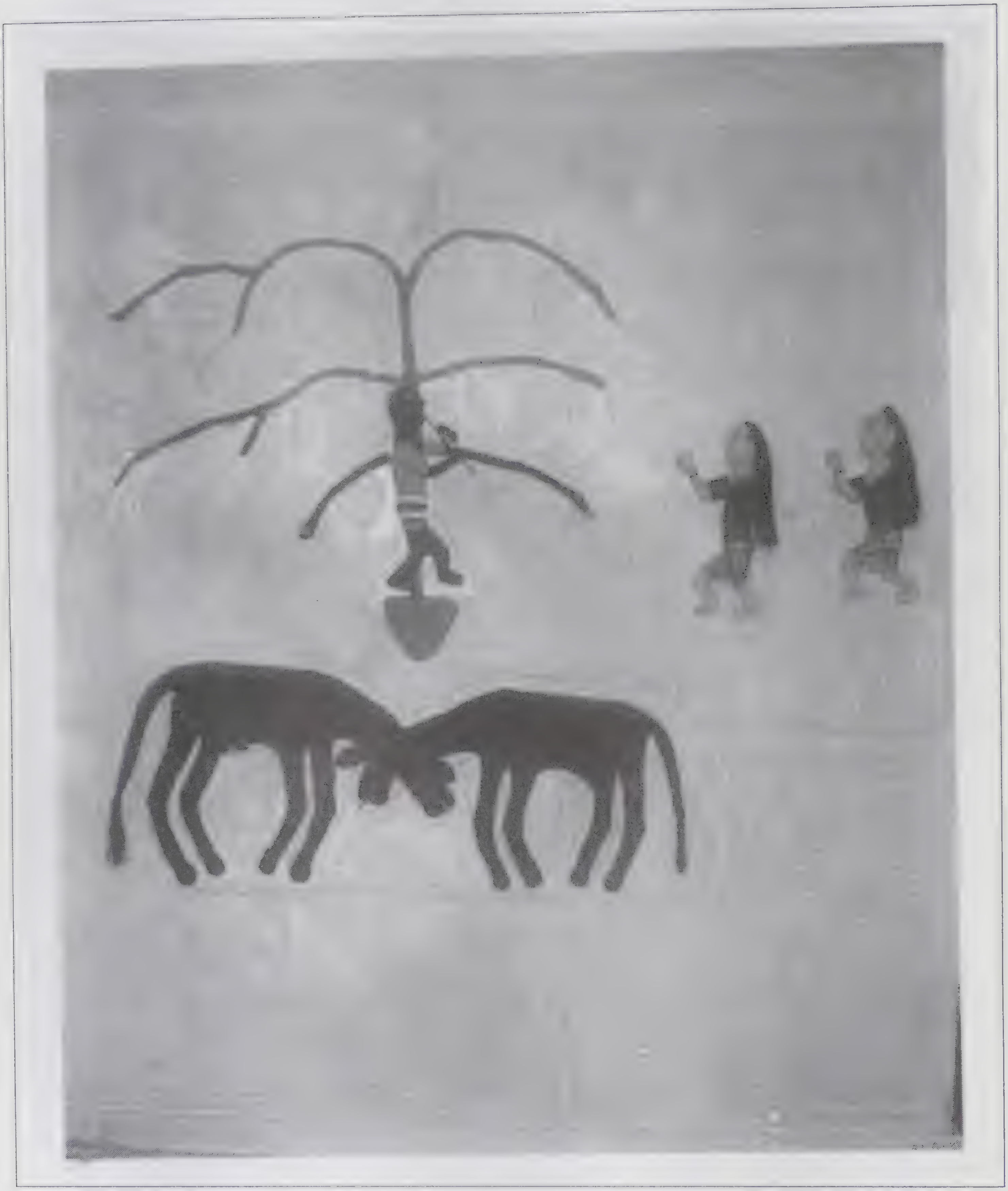
Ganga Devi, Festival of American Folk Life, *inks on paper, 55 x 76 cm, 1986*



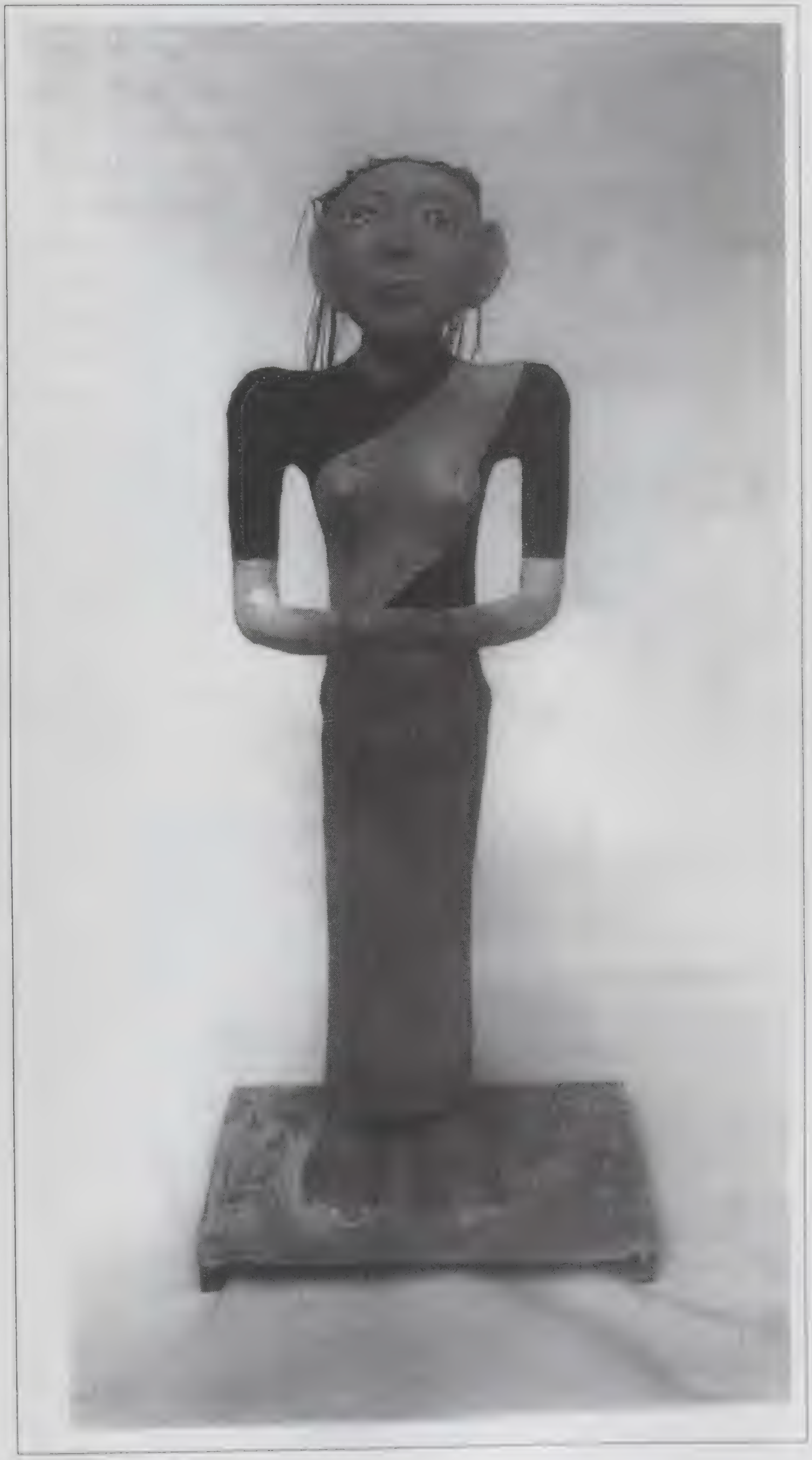
Ganga Devi, Ride in a Roller Coaster, *inks on paper, 55 x 78 cm, 1986. Collection: Crafts Museum, New Delhi*



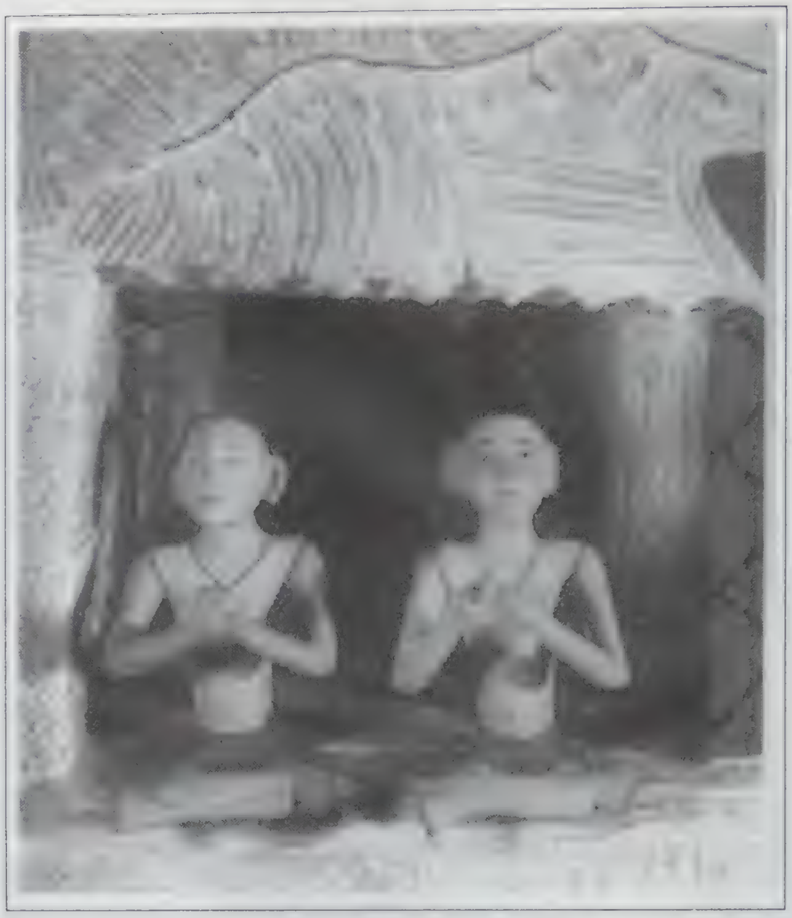
Sonabai, Grain Storage Jar, *wood and bamboo armature covered with clay and cowdung, and pigment painted, 1977. Collection: Crafts Museum, New Delhi*



Sonabai, Krishna and Milkmaids,
clay relief work on wall, approx. 250 x 250 cm, 1997



Sonabai, Female Figure, *clay and cowdung, pigment painted, 40 x 30 cm, 1996*



Sonabai, Musicians, *detail of a grain storage jar, wood and bamboo armature coated with clay, and pigment painted, 1977. Collection: Crafts Museum, New Delhi*

Neelamani Devi, Pot, *terracotta, 70 x 55 cm, 1987. Collection: Crafts Museum, New Delhi*

NOTES

Note: Major portions of this article are based on the author's earlier book *Ganga Devi: Tradition and Expression in Mithila Painting*, Ahmedabad: MAPIN Publishing Pvt. Ltd., 1997, and two articles: "Ganga Devi", and "Sonabai", in *Other Masters. Five Folk and Tribal Artists of India*, New Delhi: Crafts Museum and the Handicrafts and Handlooms Exports Corporation of India Ltd., 1998.

1. For a detailed discussion on the subject see Stella Kramrisch: "Traditions of the Indian Craftsman", in Milton Singer (ed.), *Traditional India: Structure and Change*, Philadelphia: American Folklore Society, 1959.
2. The famous Indian art and Craft exhibition: *Indian Art at Delhi, 1903*, does not mention women among award winners, not even in the embroidery section.
3. On any occasion Mrs. Pupul Jayakar saw the term 'craftsman' being used, she immediately replaced it by 'craftsperson' to include women practitioners in the scope of the term.
4. During this period 600 national awards have been given out of which only 80 went to women.
5. Ganga Devi's participation in the Exhibition *Aditi* held in Washington, DC in 1985, Baua Devi's representation in *Magicians de la Terre* held at Centre George Pompidou in 1989, Sonabai setting up an installation at the Third Asia Pacific Triennial in Brisbane in 1998 and Neelamani Devi's participation in various exhibitions held in Sweden, Austria, Japan and the USA are a few examples of these artists' recognition outside India.
6. Geeti Sen, "Fourth Triennial: Trials and Tribulations", in *The Times of India*, New Delhi, January, 1978.
7. For more information on Jivya Soma Mashe, see Yashodhara Dalmia, *The Painted World of the Warlis*, New Delhi: Lalit Kala Akademi, 1988; Beier Ulli, *Soma Mase and Other Warli Painters*, Port Moresby, 1977.
8. For the custom of prohibition on the use of potter's wheel by women, see: Jyotindra Jain: "The Implicit and the Manifest in Indian Folk Art and Mythology", in Nora Fisher, (ed.), *Mud, Mirror and Thread*, Middletown NJ: MAPIN Publishing Pvt. Ltd., 1993.
9. For information on individualism in Pahari Painting, see B.N. Goswamy and Eberhard Fischer: *Pahari Masters*, Zurich: Artibus Asiae, 1992.
10. The author has published a full-length monograph on Ganga Devi, namely *Ganga Devi: Tradition and Expression in Mithila Painting, op. cit.*
11. Yves Vequaud, a French national and author of: *Women Painters of Mithila*, London: Thames & Hudson, 1977, was an important patron of Mithila paintings in the early 1970s. He was popularly known as 'Bihko Fransi' in the villages of Madhubani.
12. Misraji refers to H.P. Misra, then Assistant Director of the Marketing and Service Extension Centre, Madhubhani, Bihar, run by the Ministry of Textiles, Govt. of India.
13. Shampa Shah, "Sonabai Rajwar" (in Hindi), in: *Anasuya (Bhopal)*, no. 1, 1994, p. 21.
14. The incident is narrated by Shampa Shah, *ibid.*, pp. 21–22.
15. Quoted in Shampa Shah: "Neelamani Devi", in Jyotindra Jain (ed.): *Other Masters, op. cit.*
16. *Ibid.*, p. 61.

CHAPTER 21

Women Patrons of Art and Architecture: The Case of Stepwells of Gujarat

Jutta Jain-Neubauer

INTRODUCTION

No form of architecture on the Indian subcontinent is as closely associated with women as that of the stepwells of Western India, especially Gujarat. The purpose of this essay will be to demonstrate how the feminine principle plays a fundamentally important role in the theology and symbology of the stepwell. In order to assess the significance of this association we must briefly acquaint the readers with the form, function and theological implications of the stepwell.

THE ARCHITECTURE OF A STEPWELL

Stepwells are magnificent underground monuments built to serve as resources of water. These well-monuments are found all over Western India, but their most exquisite examples belong to Gujarat. Whereas temples are built above the ground, stepwells are dug deep into the ground. As the name indicates, a stepwell is a water-monument with a stepped corridor that descends steeply downwards, usually in a straight line, till it hits the ground-water level, deep inside the earth so as to expose as little surface area as possible to the sun, thus preventing evaporation of water and providing shade to its various storeys and galleries. These monuments are ideal to conserve and store water all through the year and their numerous platforms, galleries and spacious landings serve as cool resting places for villagers and travellers during the hot summer months. The side walls of the stepped corridor are covered, often fully, with rows of sculptures depicting deities from the Hindu pantheon, or relief work in the style and iconography of the corresponding temple architecture. Some elaborate types of stepwells are built as votive monuments dedicated to a divinity. As we shall see later in the course of this article, a stepwell is *de facto* considered to be a subterranean temple.

A stepwell consists of three constituent architectural parts, namely the vertical well (*kupa*) with an arrangement for hauling up water by buckets (*ghata-yantra*) for household usage or for irrigation of the nearby fields; the stepped corridor leading several storeys into the ground – starting from the entrance pavilion and ending at the ground water level of the well; and numerous intermediate tower-like pavilions (*kuta*) built as halls (*mandapa*) opening into the stepped corridor. How deep, how long and how broad a stepwell will be and how many intermediate pavilions are required to be built, does not only depend on the architectural and artistic intention, but also to a large extent on the geological conditions of the surrounding soil, whether it is sandy or rocky, and how deep the water table is in that region.

The invention of a stepwell in the arid and hot climate of Gujarat is a fascinating example of the response of the people to extreme climatic conditions. Most of the area of Gujarat lies in a monsoon belt which has unsubstantial rainfall even during the months of June, July and August. During these few months water becomes available to some extent, when rivers, lakes, wells, ponds and tanks get filled up. But the storage system for water has to be extensive and innovatively planned in order to tide over the long period of drought during the dry months. Stepwells fulfil the necessity of storing and retrieving water in a more effective manner.

STEPWELL AS A PLACE OF WORSHIP

In the case of stepwells, the role of women as patrons, rather matrons, of art and architecture has to be seen in the entire spectrum of their social and religious significance.

A stepwell embodies the innate powers of the Earth, as if representing the culmination of the creative energy, a metaphor for creation *per se.* At the mundane level of everyday life, a stepwell functions as a source of water having profane status but in conjunction with the ritual cycle, when the deities 'residing' in the well are invoked by the women folk on a special religious occasion, the space at once becomes charged with divine presence. The more physical entity of routine activity thus gets converted into a consecrated space endowed with fertility and proliferation.

Usually a stepwell in Gujarat is a place of worship *par excellence* for girls, newly wed brides and young mothers. It is believed that when the divinities residing in the water of the stepwell are invoked and venerated, they mobilise the innate powers of procreation latent in the earth and by this they sustain the cycle of life.

DIVINITIES OF WATER: *APSARAS*, SACRED RIVERS AND MOTHER GODDESSES

In a number of Indian legends the *apsaras*, the enchanting heavenly nymphs are believed to be fond of water and are described in the following words: " ... going in the waters or between the waters of the clouds, they inhabit the sky but often visit the earth".[1] Usually they are found playing in or around water, ponds or lakes. The word *apsaras*, commonly found in Vedic as well as mediaeval Sanskrit literature, is derived from the Vedic root *ap* (f), meaning "water, or the Waters considered as divinities" in combination with the derivative from the root *sr*, meaning "to flow, or emanate". From the very early Vedic period onwards rivers were considered sacred and addressed to as goddesses. Both the main rivers of the

Gangetic valley, Ganga and Yamuna, and also the mythical river Sarasvati, were considered particularly sacred and worshipped as independent goddesses. Zimmer briefly sums up this concept as follows: "… Ganga (the Ganges), Yamuna (Jumna), Sarasvati (the Saraswati) ... bestow upon the children of the world all the boons of earthly happiness – abundance of crops and cattle, prosperity, offspring, health, long life".[2] Since ancient times the association of the mother goddess in the form of a nude female with a water-animal, i.e. *makara* (alligator) or tortoise seems to have been conceived.[3] This connection of the mother goddess with the waters could be traced back to some passages in the Rigveda. In many verses of this religious text, the waters are praised as a goddess – in their anthropomorphic form they are *apsaras,* i.e. the heavenly beauties, and they are seen as mothers or young wives.[4] In early temple architecture Ganga and Yamuna were often depicted in their anthropomorphic form as a goddess standing on a water animal such as a crocodile in the case of Ganga, or tortoise in the case of Yamuna, and carrying a pitcher of water.[5] In this context it is interesting to note that a stepwell was compared to the sacred river Ganga in the inscription at the Rudabai stepwell of village Adalaj, near Ahmedabad. It is mentioned there: "The Queen of the valorous King Virasimha, by name Ruda, the good daughter of the lord of Vena, caused to be made this stepwell which is like the heavenly river".[6] Ganga has always been considered to be a heavenly river. She came down to earth to distribute her sacred and innate powers, therefore she is called "heavenly Ganga" (*akasaganga*), "heavenly river" (*svarnadi*), "river of the gods" (*suranadi*) and even, and this is extremely of importance to us in this context of this article, "heavenly stepwell" (*svarvapi*). All these names imply Ganga's origin from heaven or the gods.[7] Not only the Ganga and the Yamuna, but the rivers in general and water *per se,* were considered sacred, auspicious and full of life-giving powers. "The representation of river goddesses, of which Ganga and Yamuna are the most famous ... can be traced back to a concept of the goddess of plenty, a concept in which Sri-Bhu and Nadi-devatas are comingled, and a beautiful damsel carrying food in a plate and water in a jar standing on a *makara,* Ganga's vehicle, suggests the goddess of food, water, plenty and prosperity".[8] That the waters in general are seen as mother goddesses even today is evident from the existing popular belief that wells and stepwells bestow plenty of milk to breast-feeding mothers, if they worship the deities residing in them in the prescribed way. These deities are also believed to grant longevity and salvation from committed sin. The "full jar" (*purna-ghata*) i.e. a jar full of water is usually the attribute of the river goddesses and *apsaras,* when depicted in their anthropomorphic forms.

As the prime source of life, water is not only the most essential asset of life, but it also possesses the natural potential to protect and maintain life, as it initiates proliferation and growth. It may be due to this notion that water is used as an essential part in a number of rituals and sacrifices; that water places are connected with fertility rites and mother goddess worship; and that a person is awarded high religious merit for constructing a well or a stepwell. As one inscription says: "As long as the moon and the sun (endure), may (the water of) this sweet well be drunk by men! (By founding) forts, pure groves, pools of water by hundreds, and feeding houses step by step, the wealthy earn merit. (The lady) Bai Sri Harir by name built his well at great expense, in order to benefit the world".[9] The age-old association of mother goddess worship with watering places forms an intrinsic feature of this cult. It is said that a *sakti tirtha,* a sacred place of the female energy (*sakti*), is necessarily connected to a sacred pond (*kunda*).[10] According to a popular belief in Western India, especially in Gujarat, a mother-goddess called Varudi, Varuchi Ma or Vareodi Ai is believed to be residing in a stepwell, or on the coast of the sea, or on the bank of a river or pond. She is supposed to be a goddess of fertility and worshipped to bestow good crops.[11] It is interesting to note in this context that in the present-day ritual young brides or couples immediately after the marriage ceremony go to a well or stepwell to do homage to the water deity for receiving a boon of fertility. Of a similar significance is the rite performed by a young mother after the birth of her first son. This rite purifies her, as a woman during childbirth is considered impure, and secures longevity for her child. This ceremony starts with a procession in which the young mother is taken out to the well or tanks, where she installs *jaladeva* and *sapta matrka*, the seven mother-goddesses. She brings offerings of foodstuffs and fetches water. Without propitiating *jaladeva* in this way, she is not entitled to fetch any water for the household. Such rites are common to all Hindu castes, especially among the Mer community in the Barda Hill area, and the Kanbi, a pastoral community of Saurashtra.[12]

In rural life a continuity of the flow of water in wells, stepwells and ponds is secured by offerings or sacrifices to the water deity. These could be rice, grains, fruits, milk, an animal sacrifice or even a human sacrifice or self-sacrifice. The Great Goddess who is believed to be residing in the waters, is propitiated in the most potent way by a sacrifice of human life, possibly a virgin or a young bridal couple. The legend connected with the Sahasralinga Talao narrates how a human sacrifice was needed in order to regain water in this tank which had dried up due to a curse. While digging Sahasralinga Talao, Siddha Raja, the king of Patan, fell in love with Jasma Odan, a girl belonging to a community that traditionally was engaged in digging wells.[13] While refusing his advances, she put a dagger into her stomach, and dying she cursed the Raja that the tank that he just got built would not have water. Only when Mayo, a Dhedh[14] by caste, was made to commit a self-sacrifice in the tank, water started flowing into it again and – in utmost gratitude – the king allowed the Dhedh to live with other higher castes in town and not to wear a distinctive dress.[15] The folk song of Madha stepwell in Vadhvan is another testimony to this practice. Since the song of Madha stepwell is rather significant in this context, it might be of interest to reproduce it *in toto*:

> Since twelve years Madha stepwell is being dug,
>   but no water has appeared, my dear,
> call the fortune-teller and see the future,
>   call the fortune-teller, my dear,
> the expert fortune-teller also said:
>   offer the son and daughter-in-law, my dear,
> riding and playing with the horse, Vajmal, my son,
>   grandfather is calling you, my dear,
> what are you telling me, my able grandfather,
>   why do you need me, my dear,
> the expert fortune-teller also said:
>   offer the son and daughter-in-law, my dear
> why are you asking me, my able grandfather,
>   go and ask the one who is born of another, my dear,

feeding the son, oh daughter-in-law,
    the mother-in-law is calling you, my dear,
what are you saying, my able mother-in-law,
    why do you need me, my dear,
the expert fortune-teller also said:
    Madha vav demands a pair, my dear,
my dear barber, my brother barber,
    take this message, my dear,
tell my mother this much,
    to bring me the veil cloth and headgear, my dear,
with songs and music (they) came to Madha vav,
    take, Madhav vav, this pair, my dear,
as they went down the first step,
    water appeared in the underworld, my dear,
as they went down the second step,
    the waters were seen, my dear,
as they went down the third step,
    the waters were up to the ankles, my dear,
as they went down the fourth step,
    the waters were up to the knees, my dear,
as they went down the fifth step,
    the waters were up to the waist, my dear,
as they went down the sixth step,
    the waters were up to chest, my dear,
as they went done the seventh step,
    helplessly the soul departed, my dear.[16]

A clear indication of the association of stepwells with mother goddess worship can be observed in the fact that many stepwells are shrines sacred to one or the other aspect of the *devi*, the Goddess, or *mata*, the mother (goddess). This is revealed in the names of the stepwells and those mentioned in historical and literary sources, for example Mata Bhavani stepwell, Asapuri stepwell (both in Ahmedabad), Sindhvai Mata stepwell (in Patan), Ankol Mata stepwell (in Davad), Matri stepwell (in Kankavati), Sikotari stepwell (in Petlad), Manjushri stepwell (in Dhank), Minal stepwell (in Virpur) or Ganga stepwell (in Vadhvan). Other stepwells have female appellations, for example Rani ni Vav (the stepwell of the Queen, in Patan), Sasu stepwell (the stepwell of the mother-in-law, at Kalesvari ni Nal), Madha stepwell (in Vadhvan), Rudabai stepwell (in Adalaj) or Dada Harir stepwell (in Ahmedabad).

The iconography of the sculptures which are housed in the miniature shrines, in the niches and on the friezes in a stepwell bears testimony to this. Nearly always *sapta matrka* (the seven mother-goddesses), the eight *matrkas* (the eight mother-goddesses), Ganga (river goddess Ganga), and Navadurga (Durga in her nine forms or aspects), or other symbolic representations of one or the other aspect of the Great Goddess, for example Amba, Durga, Mahisasuramardini, or marriage goddesses like Sitala are depicted.[17] Occasionally, depictions of a pregnant woman, a woman with a child or giving birth to a child also appear in the sculptural work of a stepwell.

A few individual or group images of goddesses are enumerated in some of the ancient texts on architecture wherein stepwells are also mentioned. The goddesses mentioned, who are supposed to be represented in a stepwell are: Ganga, Candika, Navadurga, the eight *matrka*. Navadurga includes the nine forms of Durga, these are Kumarika, Trimurti, Kalyani, Rohini, Kali, Candika, Sambhavi, Durga and Bhadra. The eight *matrka* who are conceived as divine mothers and represent the female counterparts of the major Hindu deities are Brahmi, Vaisnavi, Raudri (or Mahesvari), Kaumari, Aindri (or Indrani), Yami, Varuni and Kauberi. It is understandable that an image of river goddess Ganga is to be installed in a water place like a stepwell. Especially the *matrkas* who are also visualised as the personified energies of the principal deities and therefore worshipped as fertility deities, are associated with water-monuments. Mahisasuramardini sculptures of the goddess killing the buffalo demon Mahisa, epitome of the female prowess *per se*, are found in nearly each and every stepwell in Gujarat. Occasionally, goddess Bhairavi carrying a *damaru* and a stick with skull is also shown.

STEPWELL AS A SHRINE

In many stepwells a shrine is installed. It is either located at the back of the well shaft itself, or more often on the platform immediately in front of it, i.e. in the last *kuta* (pavilion construction) of the stepped corridor. Some examples of these are the Mata Bhavani stepwell Ahmedabad, the Sindhvai Mata stepwell in Patan, the Ankol Mata stepwell in Davad. In the Jnanesvara stepwell in Modhera and the Ganga stepwell in Vadhvan, the small shrine is not installed in the far end, but in the first pavilion. In some stepwells, there is no actual shrine, but the sacredness of the well-portion is indicated by sculptured rows of deities (for example Lakshmi) and heavenly beauties as in the stepwell in Sathamba, or rows of shrines as in the stepwell in Khedbrahma, or niches indicating shrines.

The closeness of a divine spot with a water place is prescribed for the location of a temple in canonical scriptures, for example, when it is mentioned: 'In places without tanks, gods are not present. A temple therefore should be built, where there is a pond on the left, or in the front, not otherwise'.[18] Also the Tantrasamuccaya suggests the installation of gods at lovely places like a *tirtha* (sacred place of pilgrimage, often situated at the banks of a river or a pond), banks of rivers and lakes, and on the seashore.[19] In the case of water not being available either in natural or artificially built tanks or ponds, jars filled with water could represent the water places.

Seeing the stepwells in their entire cultural as well as religious perspective, it is not surprising that it is mainly women who initiated the construction of stepwells. Mother-goddess worship is a main and dominant feature of the religiosity in the region of Gujarat and Rajasthan (generally Western India). Stepwells, being dug into the *Earth* and being a *source of water*, are the most appropriate and favourable abodes for all kinds of mother goddesses conceived in this region. To substantiate this notion the inscription on Dada Harir stepwell is very important. It says: "Victorious is the mother of the three worlds, the supreme sakti, kundalini, by name whose feet are praised by gods and men (and) who ever (exists) in the form of wells". According to this inscription, wells (stepwells included) were conceived as the embodiment of female power, be it named sakti or kundalini.

Therefore to fulfil her fundamental and essential yearning, a woman – who had the status and means – would get a stepwell constructed, for the benefit and nourishment of birds, animals and human beings alike.[20]

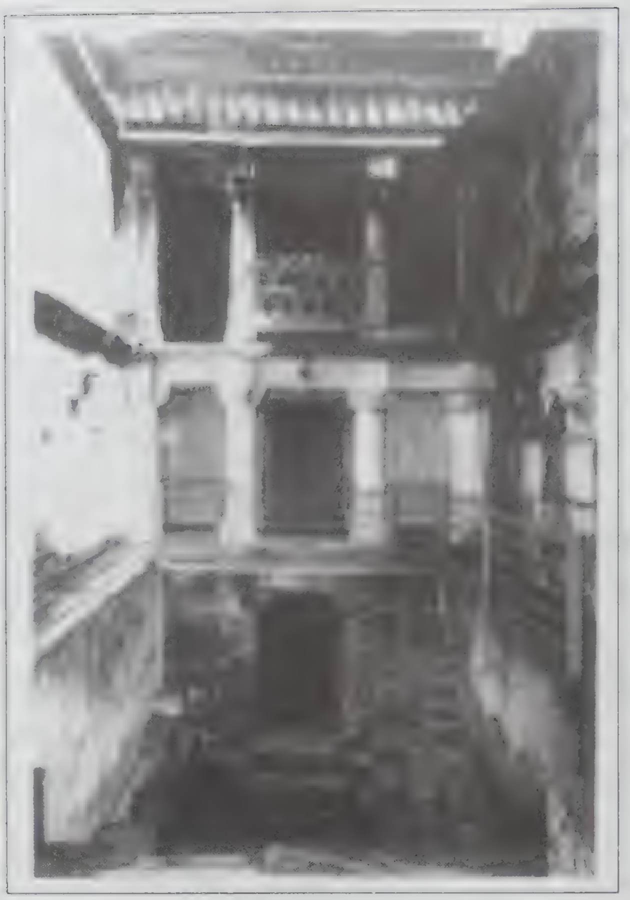
There are many inscriptions that tell of ladies of royal houses or of aristocratic families who initiated the construction of a stepwell. For example, Rani Rudadevi, wife of the Vaghela chief Virasimha of Dandehidesa, during the reign of Mahmud Begarah (1458–1511) who had built the stepwell of Adalaj in the year v.s. 1555, corresponding to A.D. 1499; Bai Harira, also known as Dada Harir, the 'general superintendent at the door of the harem of the King (Mahmud Begarah)' in the year corresponding to 1500 (in Ahmedabad); Minal Devi, mother of Jayasimha Siddharaj (1094–1144), who is supposed to have built the Minal stepwell in Virpur, Saurashtra, in v.s. 1150 (i.e. A.D. 1095), and Udayamati, consort of Bhimadeva I, who ordered the building of Rani stepwell in Patan. Merutunga records in his 'Prabandhacintamani' that Udayamati got a new stepwell built in Sripattana (the present town of Patan) which surpassed even the Sahasralinga Talao.[21]

One inscription found in village Sadadi, dated v.s. 1654, corresponding to A.D. 1597 mentions that a pious lady of Jaina faith constructed in honour of her dead son Tarachanda and his eleven wives who became *sati*, a *tirtha* in the form of a *vapi*. This inscription is important, not only from the point of view of female patronage of a stepwell, but also giving evidence of the use of a stepwell as a *tirtha*, a sacred place of worship and pilgrimage. It says: "a new stepwell built Mai Sri Kapura with her victorious son Saha Sri Sartanaji, caused a *tirtha* to be made called Tara Vapi for the merits and welfare of her son Tarachanda, his eleven wives (who are) *sati* and his sons. May there be happiness. May this pleasant and propitiating pure *tirtha* in the form of a *vapi* with a large *mandapa* endure as long as sun and moon exists. May there be wealth, Sri".[22] Very interesting in this connection is the use of the term *tirtha* (meaning a sacred place of pilgrimage, often located at the banks of a river, a lake or at the source of a river), which implies that this newly built stepwell was meant to be a sacred spot for worship or pilgrimage. In some inscriptions, this religious aspect of a stepwell is alluded to, when it is said that a stepwell was built and consecrated along with two temples (inscription at the stepwell at Roho, in northern Gujarat). Some other inscriptions from Rajasthan and Gujarat mention, for example that the widowed queen of king Aniruddha built Rani ki Baoli in Bundi, or the tank in Dholka in northern Saurashtra was built by the mother of the famous king Siddharaja Jayasimha Solanki.[23]

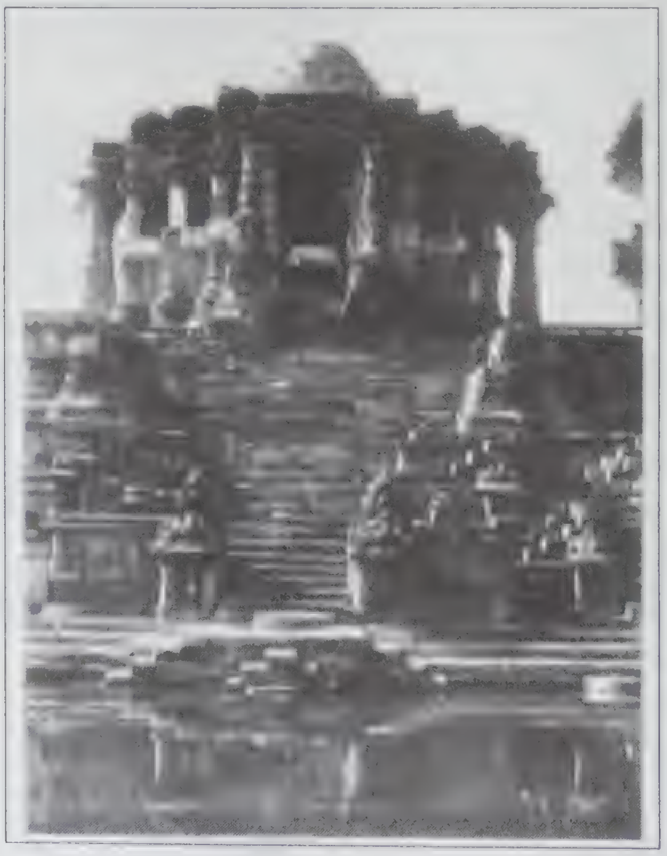
In this connection it might be interesting to contemplate for a while on two crucial words that appear again and again in the inscriptions on stepwells, as in some writings the religious significance and importance of a stepwell is often misunderstood.[24] These two words are *sati* and *tirtha*. Who is a woman who could be called a *sati*? A *sati* is a woman who has '*sat*', and '*sat*' in the rudimentary and fundamental sense simply means 'being, existing; real, actual; true, good, right; beautiful, wise, honest, venerable.[25] If we want to define *sati* now having this basic meaning in mind, a *sati* would be a woman who is 'in her true being', 'who is true to herself', who is 'true to her essence as a human being, as a woman'; but in a secondary sense the meaning would be 'a good and virtuous or faithful wife'.[26] It is not by chance that a derivative of this very word *sat*, namely *satyam*, means 'truth', 'the eternal all-pervasive truth'. The concept of the word '*sati*' as the woman who 'is true to herself', who in her deepest essence is a 'true and valuable human being', has to be understood in the context of the cultural region of Rajasthan and Gujarat – and it might be reminded that this region is roughly the one where, to use common parlance 'girls and women commit sati'[27] – and here the term *sati* has an added dimension. In this sense a woman who could be called a *sati* is the reincarnation of the abstract *sat* ('the eternal all-pervasive truth') in human form on earth. A *sati* therefore is not just a human being, but a *sati* possesses divine and supernatural powers. She is, so to say representing the divine, inexplicable powers on earth. That is what makes a *sati* different from other human beings, from other women who are just and only 'human'. A *sati* therefore is a kind of 'living goddess', the one who has divine powers in her. In one community in Gujarat this notion is particularly dominant, the Charan, who are traditionally one of the pastoral communities living in Gujarat. The Charans consider themselves to be '*deviputra*', meaning 'sons of the Goddess', which does not only refer to their mythical origin but also to the belief that all Charan women are potential, and many are actual, reincarnations of the 'Mother'. In this community of Gujarat particularly, already small girls are addressed as '*ma*' or '*ai*' meaning 'mother' and respected with utmost humility by other, even elder, members of the group. These 'living goddesses' possess and spell out the power or the bounty of the Mother.[28] In earlier times, women of the Charan community, were dreaded for their magical powers. Therefore Charan men and women were usually hired as escorts for caravans for travelling through a dangerous territory. A curse of a Charan woman was dreaded with such horror that robbers and wayside plunderers would immediately run for their own safety as fast as possible. In case a robber is not detered, a Charan woman would cut off her breast and commit suicide by piercing the dagger into her stomach, with the sure result of divine punishment of the wrong-doers, sooner or later.

In this wider context of '*sati*' being a kind of 'living goddess', it becomes evident that a *sati* is not necessarily a widow, she might be, but even if she is, this is usually rather irrelevant. Since a *sati* is a woman who has magical charm and who possesses extraordinary divine powers, we can interpret the contents of the inscriptions on stepwells now as follows: when it is mentioned that a *sati* got a stepwell constructed, it is not, because she is a widow or she wanted to commemorate her husband or was 'yearning to be reunited with her departed husband', but because of her innate divine powers she had the intention and obsession to establish a sacred place possessed with divine powers on earth, i.e. an abode of divinities, an abode of the divinities of fertility and proliferation, a *tirtha*. And now we have reached the second word which is used in many inscriptions as appellation for a stepwell: a *tirtha*, a place of pilgrimage, which implies that a stepwell possesses the same kind of divine powers as a pilgrimage centre would have.

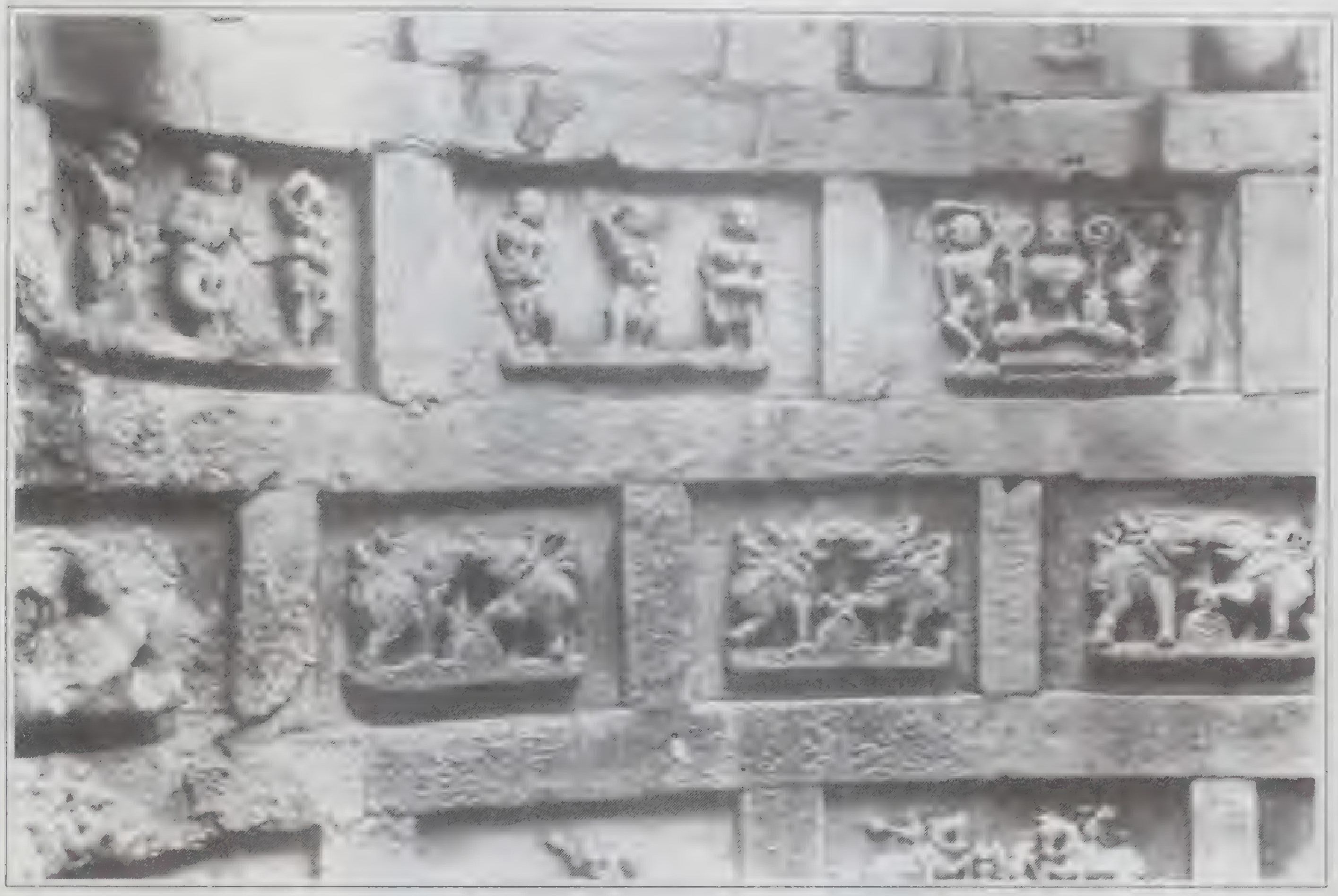
These few references clearly establish the connection of women to stepwells. The notion of a woman as harbinger of wealth, prosperity, well-being, proliferation and fertility, meaning creation and a continuation of the cycle of life, is excellently symbolised in a stepwell, the sanctified source of water *par excellence*. This might be one of the reasons why mostly women had initiated the construction of stepwells.



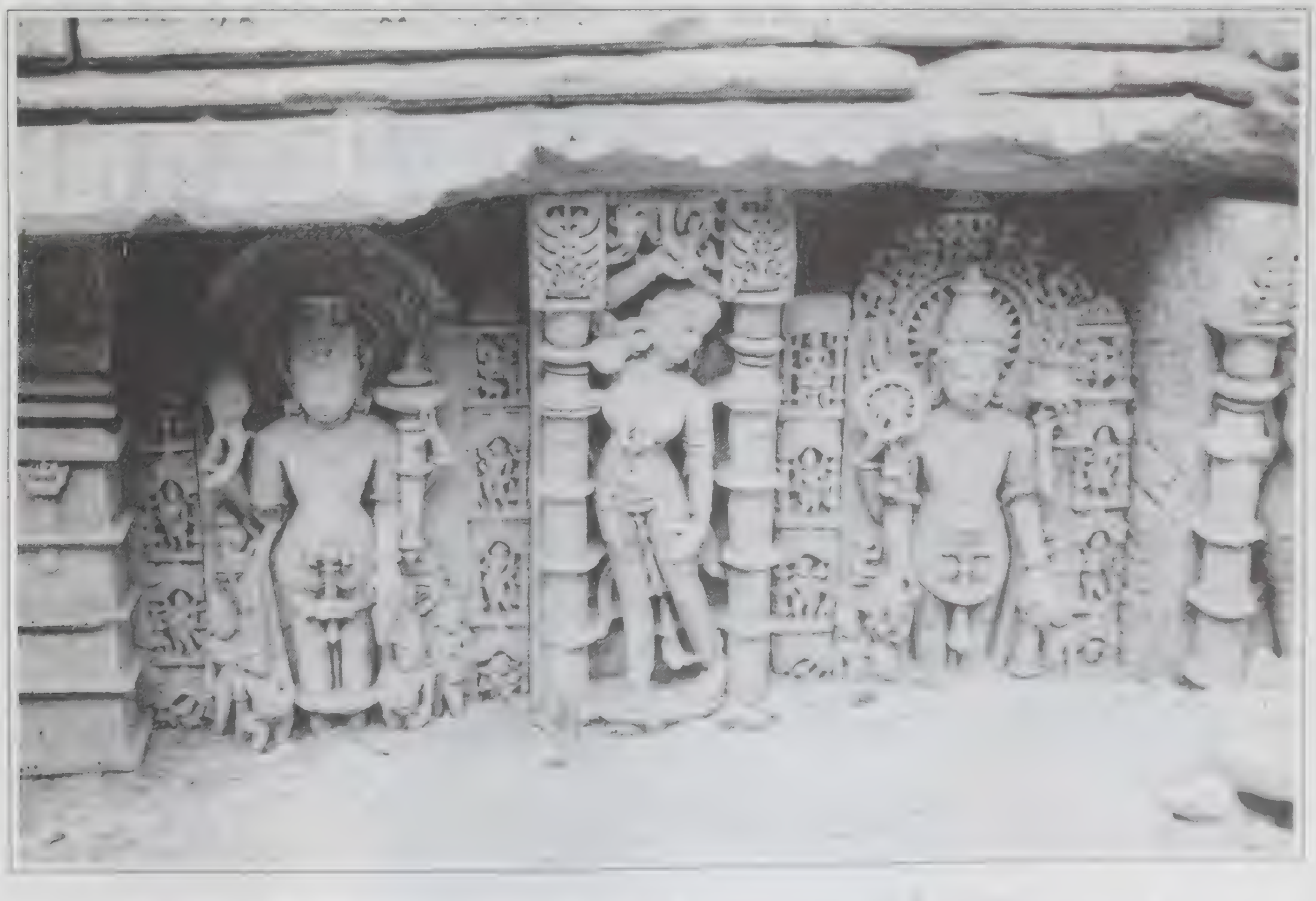
Surya kunda *at Surya Temple, Modhera, water reservoirs, like stepwells or ponds, are often connected with a temple, leading in a straight line to the entrance hall* (Mukha-mandapa) *and sanctum sanctorum* (garbha grha)



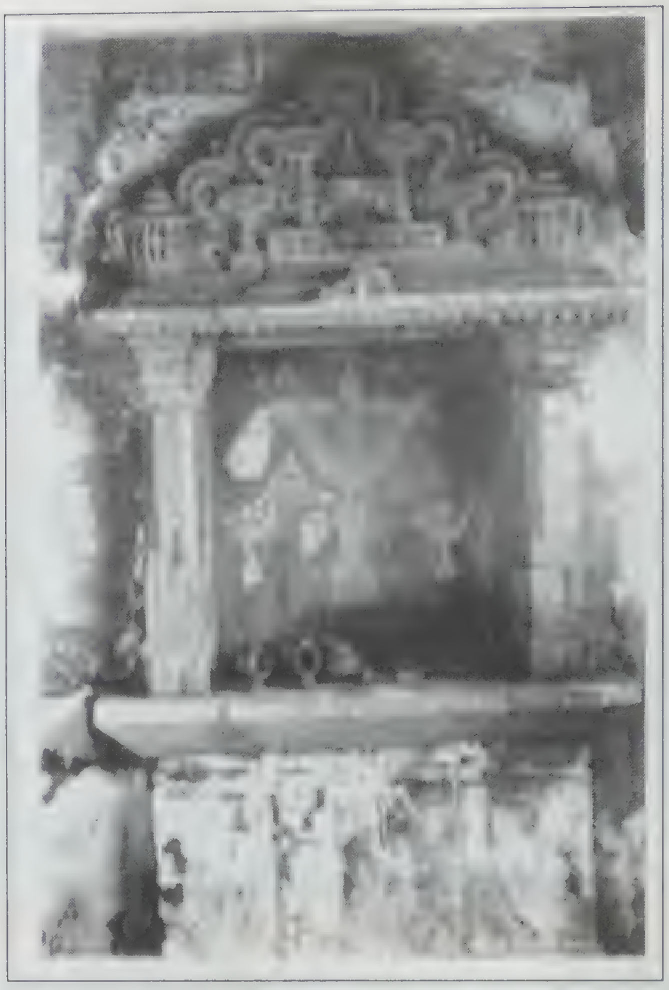
The well (kupa), *often compared to the* sanctum sanctorum (garbha grha) *of a temple, is the most sacred portion in a stepwell, and is considered to be the abode of water divinities, therefore exquisitely ornamented with friezes with Vishnu reclining on Sesha, goddesses or* apsaras.



The well of the stepwell in Sathamba, North Gujarat, is covered with friezes of goddess Lakshmi, dancing girls, and other motifs, ca 12th century



Sculptures of heavenly nymphs or semi-divine beauties flank Hindu deities Rani ki vav, Patan

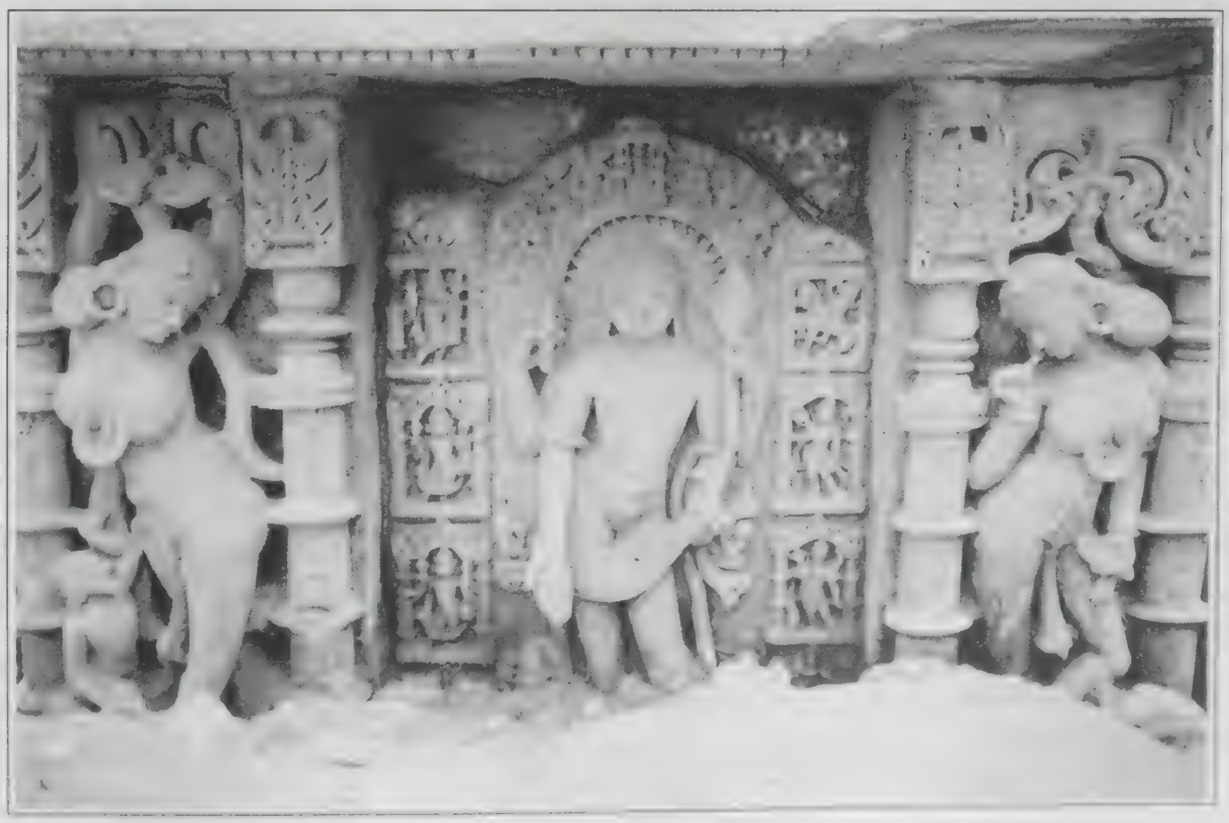


The presence of the Great Goddess is marked by depictions of her attributes, such as trishula, *painted in red vermilion paste on the walls, Ganga stepwell, Vadhwan, ca 12th cent*

A

B

A and B. The lion represents the Goddess, highlighted by the surmounted trident and the red dots within the eyes, Rudabai stepwell, Adalaj, near Ahmedabad



A stepwell as shrine. The last kuta, *pavilion construction, leading to the well (painted white) is a shrine, Mata Bhavani Stepwell, Ahmedabad*

NOTES

1. Monier: Monier-Williams *Sanskrit–English Dictionary*, New Delhi, first Indian edition 1976, p. 59.
2. Heinrich Zimmer: *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization*, Bollingen Series VI, Princeton University Press, 1974, pp. 59–60.
3. J.N. Banerjea, *The Development of Hindu Iconography*, Calcutta, 1956, pp. 171–172.
4. A.B. Keith, *The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upanishads*, Harvard Oriental Series, vol. 31, Cambridge, Mass., 1925, p. 141.
5. For detailed discussions on these river-goddesses, see O. Viennot, *Les divinites fluviales Ganga et Yamuna aux portes des sanctuaires de l'Inde. Essai d'evolution d'un theme decorative*, Paris, 1964 Heinrich von Stietencron, *Ganga und Yamuna*, Wiesbaden 1972.
6. Jutta Jain-Neubauer, *The Stepwells of Gujarat in Art-historical Perspective*, New Delhi 1981, p. 79 (Appendix 3).
7. H. von Stietencron, op. cit., p. 49.
8. C. Sivaramamurti, "Geographical and Chronological Factors in Indian Iconography", in: *Ancient India*, vol. 6, 1950, p. 28.
9. Jutta Jain-Neubauer, op. cit., p. 78.
10. J.N. Banerjea, op. cit., p. 495.
11. Jutta Jain-Neubauer, op. cit., p. 6 quoting from: R.K. Trivedi, 'Fairs and Festivals of Gujarat', *Census of India*, 1961, vol. V. Gujarat, part VII B, Delhi, 1965 p. 275.
12. R.E. Enthoven, *Tribes and Castes of Bombay*, Bombay, 1922, vol. II, p. 151.
13. The Ods are a low caste, whose traditional occupation is that of excavating wells, ponds and tanks.
14. Dhedhs were considered untouchables and had to live outside the town and wear a stag's horn as a mark of distinction.
15. Alexander Kinloch, Forbes, *Ras Mala, Hindoo Annals of the Province of Goozerat in Western India*, London, Oxford University Press, 1916, vol. I, pp. 110–111.
16. Anon., '*Balidana num mahan smarak Madha Vav*", in: *Khambhi ane Paliya*, pp. 474–478.
17. Jyotindra Jain, *Bavaji und Devi. Bessessenheitskult und Verbrechen in India.* (Europa Verlag, Vienna, 1976). In this publication Jain has shown that Sitala being the deity of small pox is clearly considered to be a marriage deity who is requested to enter the body of young boys who – with this – become 'ripe' meaning they attain a marriageable age.
18. Stella Kramrisch, *The Hindu Temple* (...) vol. I, p. 5, quoting *Visnudharmottara* III, chap. XLIII, 25–31.
19. Ibid, quoting *Tantrasamuccaya,* I.1.28.
20. The inscription on Dada Harir stepwell says: "...Bai Shri Harir by name, caused a well to be built in order to please God, in Harirpur, ..., for the use of the eighty-four lakhs of the various living beings (viz.) men, beasts, birds, trees, etc. who may have come from the four quarters, and are tormented with thirst, ... may this (well) remain for the nourishment of insects, birds, plants and animals! ... may (the water of) this sweet well be drunk by men! ... in order to benefit the world", quoted from Jain-Neubauer, op. cit. p. 78.

21. Muni Jinavijaya (ed.) Shri Merutungacarya Viracita Prabandhacintamani, I, p. 54.
22. 'Stone inscription of a vapi ... at Sadadi ...', in: *A Collection of Prakrit and Sanskrit Inscriptions*, pp. 143–144.
23. cf. *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, VII, 2.
24. A few lines might suffice as an example of such writing: "If the stepwell was indeed a commemorative structure founded by a widow for their departed husband, then the images of Parvati's penance taken on a new perspective: perhaps they are not merely some amongst the hundreds of sculptures which decorate the monument, but the goddess separated by death from her consort and practising austerities to win reunion with him was deliberately portrayed to express Udayamati's own tragic widowed condition, and her own yearning to be reunited with her departed husband. The goddess serves as the archetype for the queen, the act of the grieving queen being assimilated to that of the goddess".
25. Monier-Williams, op. cit., p. 1134, under 'sat'.
26. Ibid., p. 1135.
27. It is a senseless misnomer.
28. Sigrid Westphal-Hellbusch, und Heinz Westphal, *Hinduistische Viehzuchter im nord-westlichen Indien*, Berlin, 1976, pp. 235–237.

SECTION SIX

POLITICS

CHAPTER 22

Political Women: An Overview of Modern Indian Developments

Tanika Sarkar

I

I have deliberately chosen a field which seems self-evident, even old-fashioned to the point of staleness. Why, one may ask, do we need to recuperate histories of political women any more? Have not the most mainstream of nationalist historians acknowledged the activities of various categories of women in anti-colonial mass movements: from queens and begums of royal and imperial courts during 1857 to peasant and tribal and middle class women in Gandhian agitations? Surely, there remains little to prove here, the only scope for feminist intervention lies in filling in gaps with larger research, to uncover more of the same.

Such impatience with the women-in-politics theme has produced something rather paradoxical in feminist historiography. While all aspects of women's lives and gender relations are now assumed to be political, women's actual, intentional political work as world-transformative and self-transformative activity, falls by the wayside. I would begin with the implications of this historiographical withdrawal.

Up to the 1970s and 1980s, there was a promising crop of feminist histories of women's movements.[1] These stretched out and reoriented the histories of nationalist politics in ways that anticipated important new historiographical turns. It has scarcely been noted, for instance, that feminist historians debated quite extensively about the dialectics of simultaneous and intertwined empowerment and constraint that characterized the relationship between nationalist leadership and women's politics: that as the nationalist leadership weakened, women assumed a larger initiative within anti-colonial politics, and vice versa. This was a framework that historians of the Subaltern Studies school developed later in their explorations into the braiding of subaltern and mainstream Congress movements.[2] Somewhat later, the perspective was extended to analyse the activities of women in Left movements in similar ways.

Such histories were not merely additive: that is, rendering visible what is hidden from history. They critically reinterpreted the intentions of nationalist leaders, they analysed the left and nationalist movements from a radically different perspective. They also unearthed new kinds of archives: women's organizational papers, private papers and published writings, correspondence among male and female activists, police reports on the nature and consequences of women's work, oral narratives, recollections of gendered political experience. One very crucial axis for the new historical narrations was the relationship between women's organizations outside the Congress and the Congress women. While the former had the freedom and autonomy to consolidate the focus on gender problems, they were also more elitist and restricted in their social composition. At the same time, however, these social limits were overcome in another sense, since they included Hindu, Muslim, Eurasian and European women working side by side, even at points of high communal tension. Congress women, on the other hand, had often to give short shrift to specifically gender issues, but, at the same time, women from all classes and castes worked closely together in Congress movements in ways that would breach several deep-rooted social taboos and gender stigma. Gandhi's own emphasis on separate spheres of action for men and women, his insistence that women stand for the values of submissiveness and self-abnegation, his own bizarre sexual experiments which instrumentalized living women, have created yet another arena of productive debate. While a number of historians have felt that his use of women in politics was purely instrumentalist and ultimately reaffirmed conventional gender norms and prescriptions, others focus more on the novel and innovative political avenues that Gandhian movements opened up for women of all sorts for the first time: they insist on the new possibilities they brought forth for women rather than on the closures. We shall return to these debates later, linking them up with similar new perspectives on the placing of women in radical class struggles.

From the late eighties, with a few exceptions, however, this stream of writing began to run dry. Earlier conceptual breakthroughs ceased to produce fresh and significant questions. What is worse, a mechanical repetition of earlier insights into very complex relations between male and female domains of politics congealed into a one-dimensional conclusion that women enter into politics only to be manipulated by male politicians, they gain only notional and counterfeit agency, and leave with a sense of loss and pain.

There have been two important consequences of these later readings. One, this pessimistic emphasis developed precisely at a time when feminist scholars were recovering women's voices, creativity and hidden modes of resistance within homes, female cultural worlds, domesticity. So, whereas the wheel was reinvented in the public domain of open politics, the domestic and the private were reinterpreted as realms of autonomy, self-making. The two separate streams of interpretation, if taken in conjunction, could combine to suggest a new sort of a separation of spheres, seeing in the private-domestic, a larger possibility of self-assertion, while a total loss of the self supposedly occurs in the modern political realm. Second, feminists obviously remain more closely aligned to Left-radical movements for rights and equality.[3] Consequently, it was the ambivalences and compromises that occurred here within gender relations and understanding that preoccupied them in this sphere. They have no affiliation and little interest in rightwing movements, and thought relatively little about rightwing gender ideologies specifically. As a consequence, whereas emancipatory struggles – anti-colonial, civil rights, left – were problematized comprehensively, and, often, with very good reason, the rightist movements were spared critical analyses.

Several other conceptual constraints have limited feminist interest in women's political activism. Serious historical investigations into gender were very soon overshadowed by a tendency towards massive overgeneralizations derived from several influential paradigms in culture studies.

Instead of working around notions of concrete, sensuous, ever-changing and turbulent material and social landscapes, scholars were content to deal in the currency of flat absolutes like capitalism or transition from feudalism under colonialism: theoretical constructs that are valid enough in themselves, but which began to be applied without any sensitivity to historical concreteness or contextual specificity. It was undoubtedly important that feminists grounded their readings of patriarchal culture upon typologies of social formation. The problem was that each such sweeping statement on social formation carried with it notions of fixed and invariant social and cultural effects. Actual histories, however, are more muddied and turgid than these *a priori* constructs. For modern times, for instance, it was assumed that capitalism in India produced a middle class that merely aped Victorian domesticity and recast women in a state of doubled servitude – to modern, capitalist forms of patriarchy, as well as to the bind of alien, western values.[4] Each unit in the description – by now paradigmatic in understandings of gender in modern India – is innocent of historical complications. There was certainly no clean transplant of western forms of capitalism here, and there are, in fact, debates about whether we should not think more in terms of a re-feudalization of social relations. Moreover, the generalization, as a whole, presumes notions of mechanical causality, a particular kind of social formation necessarily producing a single and automatic socio-cultural effect. There is no space for over-determined historical developments, taking very specific shapes in different conjunctures, generating new forms of inner contradictions in new historical moments. There was a similar problem in such paradigms with histories of political formation. All modern gender politics were assumed to be nationalist and patriarchal in equal measure, without internal variations, mutual contestations, temporal shifts, long-term transformations.

As such simplified readings of histories of gender consolidated, the earlier explorations into varied and convoluted, thickly historicized contexts for gender were replaced with an easier search for images of women, mostly in patriarchal texts. Understandably, this reiterated very similar findings across male texts of all kinds, as they were symptomatically read for signs of patriarchal manipulation. Predictably, too, women's own articulations – textual and political – were put aside, since the ubiquity of patriarchy was the intended theme. The other effect was even more debilitating for an understanding of the beginnings of modernity: precisely the time when women's critical writings, reformism, self-organization and feminism were born. In a lot of new feminist readings, on the other hand, women of such times came to be perceived as devoid of agency, as mimic Victorians, as being recast, rather than as engaged in self-fashioning. At the same time, as I remarked earlier, vital distinctions among liberal reformers, stern revivalists, outraged orthodoxy, liberal or conservative nationalists were eschewed to produce a flat, monochromatic category of patriarchalist nationalists who endlessly recast women in new roles of abjection. A framework that so signally fails to engage with historical change has little explanatory value for historians.

The shift away from women's political activism in history writing has left tragic gaps. It is not as if social and political movements, engaging the work of millions of women, do not happen any more. They go on all the time, against the state, against imperialism, against social and gender injustice.[5] They occur in the teeth of unimaginable adversities, they seethe with internal contradictions and momentous possibilities. They are, nonetheless, noted by none except those who are involved with them. On the other hand, feminist histories are increasingly marked by a universal scepticism about the political realm as such, they delineate only one kind of possible relationship between women and transformative, emancipatory politics. Women are rendered as marginalized, humiliated, abject figures, as pain-filled voices, crying out in a male-dominated political wilderness. The object of enquiry is their emotional–sexual–cultural deprivation, of loss of self-hood and identity within politics.

II

Struggles for women's rights are a modern phenomenon in our country, so much so, that they can be designated as the dominant sign of our modernity. As in all historical processes of change, however, we cannot seek a single beginning, nor do we find a simple fit between consequences and original purposes. What I mean here is that, women's politics and movements for rights did not entirely or exclusively begin with women's own initiatives, nor from clear-cut, deliberate, self-aware struggles for gender justice. In the West, concepts of political and social equality were a fall-out of contestations of divine rights monarchy, and the new ideal of citizenship, even if it took a very long time to acknowledge women as citizens. In our country, I think, the idea of equality emerged slowly out of notions of political self-determination with which colonial rule was first criticized and then challenged by Indians. Once self-determination was privileged as an absolute political good, it was impossible not to debate the justice of withholding it from women, low castes, labouring people. Early women writers in the nineteenth century were quick to point out the great duplicity within nationalism; how can you question colonization of the land, they asked, when you have subjected your own women to an anterior colonization.[6]

It was in the realms of social reform, especially of Hindu marriage laws, in the nineteenth century, that slowly a fledgeling notion was worked out that refigured the woman as a person with inalienable immunities and entitlements in some spheres of her life: entitlements that the state must underwrite even when her family, her faith and her community denied them. Through the great debates over sati, widow remarriage, infant marriage and the age of consent issues, the woman rewrote herself – against the grain of massive orthodox opposition and revivalist backlash – as a rights-bearing person.[7] With the beginning of mass movements against colonial presence, the woman – along with other subalterns – acquired a necessary, important, acknowledged presence in the struggles in very important capacities. There could, indeed, be no mass struggles in their absence, no great pressure that could be brought about against the state if these subaltern populations were denied access to the nationalist mainstream. It was their demonstrated capacity for political activism that ensured political equality and citizenship rights in the post-colonial constitution. Political rights for women, thus, often came through struggles for very different things, appeared under a very different name. Moreover, mass movements throw up social thinking which often appears incoherent, without clearly designated labels, which obscure the extent of consciousness and intellection that actually go into them.[8] For these reasons, women's politics in movements that did not hold out an explicit promise for gender justice, nor an explicit and comprehensive critique of patriarchy, as such, have not been taken too seriously by feminist scholars after the first generation of feminist historians.

It is an intricate and delicate exercise to trace the shifting and complex beginnings of women's political awareness and rethinking gender in India. In any case, there is neither a singular, nor a pure or continuous lineage. By the late nineteenth century, women writers had vaulted over the public–private divide to a large extent. Educational reforms, the growth of vernacular prose that was closer to their everyday speech habits, and the new print culture, enabled them to re-describe the domestic sphere in a radically critical voice. Even though they remained segregated within the domestic domain, their words entered the public sphere of print, making them participants in the wide-ranging public debates on new marriage laws and female education. By the end of the century, some rebels had forged an alternative lifestyle for themselves: Pandita Ramabai, Rokeya Hossain, Rukhmabai. Other, less overtly rebellious women, utilized familial support and educational reforms to emerge as formal degree-holders, teachers, doctors, reformers, educationists.[9] At a time when the very notion of female literacy was framed within severe religious interdictions, the new women achievers acted as inspirational exemplars for a new female life-world. By the turn of the century, such fragmentary achievements had multiplied enough to turn into networks and associations among educated and professional women. Even among women who remained confined to their homes, the new exemplars expanded the world of imaginable possibilities. Moreover, since a group of upper caste women were taking to education and activism, a new mode of sanskritization gradually emerged among the aspiring and affluent low caste segments who wanted to align themselves closer to upper caste practices. Instead of hard, orthodox norms, they had the choice of new, more liberal gender norms, and some groups did educate their women in an effort at self-strengthening.

From the early twentieth century, women started their own associations for the education, skill-generation and employment for economically vulnerable women, especially upper caste widows: Pandita Ramabai in Poona, Sister Subbalakshmi in Madras and Rokeya in Patna and Calcutta.[10] These women acquired organizational skills to cope with the efficient management requirement of public associations very rapidly. Historian Dorothy Thompson, talking about woment in the Chartist movement in mid-nineteenth century England, has said that an absence of such public skills has consigned political women invariably to lesser and inferior functions within male-dominated political realms.[11] Here, however, we find that women learnt such skills in the segregated sphere of women's associations and felt free and confident in their deployment.

They also learnt to cope with the outrage and opposition from sections of their religious communities. Pandita Ramabai converted to Christianity, courting enormous social ostracism from caste Hindus, but she faced great opposition from her own church as well, when she insisted on her individualistic interpretation of religious canon. Muslim co-religionists suspected Rokeya of being over-influenced by Christianity, and Subbalakshmi's work among women was widely suspected as underhand proselytization. They were solitary figures who had deeply fraught relations with all religious communities.

By the second decade of the century, a few women pioneers had wrested the initiative in the area of gender reform and women's welfare from the hands of male reformers. The

Women's Indian Association was set up in 1915 by Margaret Cousins, an Irish feminist, who had some Theosophical Society connections. As it was really most active in Madras, and as it was mostly upper caste, it had to compete with the very radical, egalitarian, atheistic work of the Self-Respect movement which had a theory of universal equality. The WIA, in contrast, was socially more limited, and theoretically more circumspect. The All India Women's Conference was born in 1927. It was more of a widespread movement in geographical terms, though restricted to middle class and educated elite women from the major cities. Its interventions in the debates on what should constitute an ideal education for Indian women, and what should be an ideal age of marriage for them, laid down an interesting pattern: on education, they recommended a gendered, yet advanced education, while they opposed child marriage on the ground that it was not to be found in the Vedas. Their advocacy of a higher age of marriage was very important for the legislative reform that eventually raised both male and female ages under the Child Marriages Restraint Act in 1929. It is interesting that even though a number of Muslim leaders opposed the Act, Muslim women in the organization strongly supported it. The organization thus provided an alternative community, enabling female dissent against male orthodox leadership.[12]

They now began to set the terms of debate on marriage rules, education, welfare and female franchise. Their rapid growth can be attributed to the fact that even though they audaciously staked a claim to a male domain of organized politics of associations whose bureaucratic structures, procedural norms and formality seemed to be opposed to innate female competencies, they worked with issues of maternal welfare, child care and health which are traditionally relegated to the women's sphere and where women's skills and understanding are acknowledged as authoritative. Later we find that within the left organizations, too, women could carve out a space for themselves with somewhat similar issues.

There was also a more militant and specifically political initiative that actually won acclaim and admiration from revivalist-nationalists. Sarala Devi started the Bharat Stree Mahamandal in 1910, and succeeded in setting up branches in practically all major North Indian cities. She was, in fact, one of the pioneers of the idea of women's-only organizations, and she was critical of subservience to male leadership in any sphere. Yet, her larger political horizon was closely aligned to extremist politics and the ideology of Hindu revivalism. She also initiated a model of masculinist physical culture to build up an army of dedicated patriots with trained and strong bodies. The transgressive fact of a woman venturing into deeply masculinist regions was overwritten by her militant Hinduism and her indifference to specifically gender issues and problems. This opened up space for a new kind of women's militancy that combined religious with patriotic symbols. Such female leaders were valorized by nationalists as an incarnation of sacred female energy or *Shakti*, rather than dismissed as disruptive figures who threaten religious prescription and separate spheres. The presence of such political figures led to a nationalist appropriation of Hindu female icons of patriotism: Rani of Jhansi, in particular.[13]

More mainstream women's organizations, however, were not too close to Extremist groups in politics, especially as they transcended sectarian identities. Bharata Mahila Parishad, the women's wing of the National Social Conference, was led by Ramabai Ranade and Mrs. Abbas Tyabji. Women from different communities discussed gender problems within their respective religious traditions, especially focusing on, and initiating the longstanding debates on legal disabilities of women. As I pointed out earlier, women from Muslim, Parsi, European and Hindu families came together in associations, at a time of growing communal tension and the breakdown of several important joint endeavours. They identified gender problems that cut across community differences and they continued to foreground commonalities in gender identity. Some of their demands were obviously directed at the empowerment of highly privileged women like themselves: suffrage, which would be based on high educational and property qualifications, reservation of seats for women in legislative assemblies and municipalities, inclusion of women in commissions of enquiries. However, the larger justification of such self-empowerment was always that, thus equipped, they would be able to represent and serve the needs of disadvantaged women: an argument that early nationalists had used when they sought administrative powers in the civil services for the creamy layer of privileged Indians.[14]

The new generation of women politicians and administrators came from exceptionally liberal families that cushioned their enterprise in public leadership with extraordinary opportunities: they also came from big cities with important educational centres, political circles, hubs of lively and dynamic public spheres, cosmopolitan and liberal lifestyles, at least among the educated middle classes. Sarojini Naidu, Sarala Devi, Lajjavanti, Muthulakshmi Reddy, Rameshwari Nehru, Ladorani Zutshi were bred on the opportunities that Calcutta, Madras, Lahore, Lucknow were opening up. At the same time, the advantages of urban cosmopolitanism did not cushion their ventures all the way. They were women who had taken over corners in public spaces, political roles and civic functions by storm, their demands for women's uplift were an outrage against much of the conventional understanding of the Indian woman's appointed role in life. They could not pretend that they were as free to work and mobilize as men were. There were sometimes prices to be paid, compromises to be struck, if they were to make a dent in societal norms and practices. For instance, even when they had founded their own organizations, they needed male support to provide their demands with a wider and more effective support base. Moreover, to further ensure that their extraordinary public roles did not lead them into total isolation, they needed to propitiate religious communities and moderate the thrust of their criticism of gender prescriptions. They did it in two ways. First, they underlined their devotion to their own faith: Lajjavanti, for instance, belonged to a devout Arya Samaj background, and she retained her ties with her circle. Moreover, they delinked their gender reform from discussions of the nature of religious prescriptions. We find a retreat from the earlier radical interrogations that had marked the writings of Tarabai Shinde, Pandita Ramabai, Kailashbashini Devi, Begum Rokeya, who had frequently blamed religious dogmatism as a source of gender oppression. An improved maternalism, rather than equality or rights, was the horizon of their articulations on gender, for the new generation of activists.

Within these constraints and a somewhat cautious framework that usually eschewed direct criticism of tradition, the women leaders did initiate some significant debates, some of which may assume relevance even in our times. In 1917, a women's delegation under Sarojini Naidu met Montagu and Chelmsford to ask for the vote for women. The Southborough Franchise Commission came to India to explore this soon after. Herabai Tata had gone to England to canvass support for this among British feminists, but she met with a formidable rival in Cornelia Sorabjee, then practising as a lawyer there, who insisted that given the constraints on Indian women, the vote would be a useless adornment. As the idea was dropped for the time being by the House of Commons, Madame Bhikaji Cama told disappointed suffragists that since independence alone could resolve women's subordination, they should concentrate on nationalism.

As inordinately few Indian men had the vote at the time, there were conflicting views about what kinds of women should have access to franchise. The delegation proposed that female franchise should be under the same terms as male franchise. Later, Muthulakshmi Reddy would boldly alter it to a demand for universal adult franchise, to which not all women leaders agreed. There were divides, moreover, between those who wanted special reservation for women on legislative bodies and those who argued in favour of adult franchise. Muthulakshmi Reddy, on the other hand, felt that given their educational and social vulnerabilities, female franchise would not indicate free political choices, but would strengthen the voices of rich and conservative husbands whose wives alone would be entitled to vote under the existing franchise regulations. The more important debates were about the relations between the colonial state and the women's organizations. How far should the latter seek placements within official organizations, how much would they depend upon or solicit state support for their welfare programmes? As mass movements of the Congress became increasingly agitational and confrontationist, the organizations felt more and more torn. The ambivalences and uncertainties were acute and poignant, especially in 1927–1928. During the anti-Simon agitations in these years, the Congress asked Indians to boycott the all-white Simon Commission, set up to discuss electoral and constitutional reforms. Again, in 1930, the Congress called for a boycott of the First Round Table Conference of all parties that the colonial state had organized in London, in view of the Civil Disobedience movement. In both cases, women's groups had been invited, and they expected important dividends from the meetings.

The Congress had endorsed the proposal of female franchise at the Bombay session of 1918. But Gandhi insisted that the vote was of no consequence, and women should help men fight for independence. When the Congress mass movements began, he repeated that to rural women the vote or legal rights were utterly irrelevant. Later, in the context of the feminist debates on women's legal disabilities under the Personal Laws, Jawaharlal Nehru was sympathetic, yet impatient. He thought agrarian reforms should have priority, and he was uneasy about the role of the state since this was a time of anti-state confrontations. The Congress thus endorsed ideas of franchise and legal reform, but as a secondary priority. Nor was this prioritization entirely a male strategy imposed on women's politics. Women were profoundly identified with the great mass upsurges that rocked the country, and, especially at moments of colonial repression, felt unable to focus single-mindedly on their exclusive agenda. They would feel awkward in soliciting state support or to work in state institutions. Muthulakshmi Reddy resigned her seat on the Legislative Assembly, giving up a hard-won and rare privilege. Radhabai Subbarayan and Begum Jahan Ara Shah Nawaz, on the other hand, protested against a jettisoning of the organizational and gender interests.[15]

What was the most important, long-term price of the divide, however, was not evident just then, and went beyond a choice between Congress nationalism and women's demands. In the organizations that had so far worked in the area of gender, women of all communities had managed to retain a joint front of action during a period of escalating communalization of nationalist politics. As the Muslim League and the Congress pulled apart over constitutional deliberations, and on the question of participation in state initiatives, and as the Non-Cooperation-Khilafat unity came to be replaced with massive communal rioting on an unprecedented scale, the women's organizations had remained as islands of non-sectarian unity, as long as the agenda was purely gender-based. Once a part of the group moved towards the Congress, Muslim women withdrew from the front which seemed to merge its identity with the Congress leadership.

Finally, there seemed to be some point in the widespread thinking that independence would enable the fulfillment of an agenda of equal rights. While the colonial state prevaricated on the question of vote, the enlargement of nationalist representation in the provincial legislative bodies was immediately translated as enfranchisement, though on a very limited scale. From the early twenties, under the scheme of dyarchy, women were given the vote in one province after another. Bengal held back most tenaciously till 1926. What was remarkable was that enfranchisement occurred as a result of a short-lived pact between Muslim politicians and Swarajists, despite mounting communalization; it was in this short spell of amity that both communities agreed on female franchise, proving that communal divides can effectively stalemate gender reform and give them a fundamentalist turn. When mutual suspicions and hostilities are disarmed, however, the controls over women may be reduced somewhat more easily.

III

As the Congress expanded its organizational structure and class base with its new mass movements, it remained divided over the gender question: about how far to focus on gender issues, how to think them through, and also about how far to allow women into its own organization and activities. In 1895, Tilak had forced the Congress to de-link its ties with the National Social Conference and forego an unambiguous commitment to liberal reformism over the contentious Age of Consent issue.[16] By 1920, as the Congress reorganized itself, the Extremist ascendancy declined.

A young and radical segment of leadership grew stronger, especially as Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhash Chandra Bose emerged as dynamic and powerful Congress leaders. They were ready to accept the notion of female suffrage, social reforms, formation of women's wings within the Congress. More important, energized by the new Congress and its radical agitations, women entered the organization and the movements, collecting funds for the Jallianwallabagh massacre victims, wielding the charka and propagating khadi. Sarojini Naidu, Lado Rani Zutshi, Basanti Devi and Urmila Devi, fortified by education and familial support, addressed mass meetings. So did Bi Amman, the mother of the Ali brothers, leaders of the Khilafat movement.[17] She addressed the meetings from behind her veil, establishing a kinship connection with the crowds that heard her. As her claim to a universal mother figure grew stronger, she unveiled her face. A strange and complex coupling of traditionalist and conservative strategies with radical, transgressive ends occurred here, and there is no one way to conclude which set of values were affirmed at the end.

IV

In *Subarnalata*, a popular Bengali novel of the 1970s, we find a rebellious heroine chafing against domestic tyranny within her upper caste household. The Swadeshi and revolutionary movements of the early twentieth century swirl around her; she deeply identifies with the urge for freedom and longs to join the great upsurge outside. She tells her young revolutionary kinsman in great bitterness that the movement has chosen to deny itself its most powerful support base, by closing its doors to women: for, who else would understand the themes of oppression, exploitation, slavery and bondage but women, and who else would be prepared to fight against them with greater commitment?[18]

In the Swadeshi movement of 1905–1908, women had boycotted foreign cloth and had made spectacular bonfires with them. They helped nationalist volunteers with their ornaments, they provided revolutionary terrorists with shelter and logistic support.[19] Of course, they were women of upper caste Hindu circles who thought little about the privations of ordinary peasants whom nationalists asked to boycott cheap foreign cloth. With class and caste limits ingrained in their perceptions as yet, there was still a quickening in the air as some women perceived themselves as patriots whose gender made them better representatives of the imagined Motherland.

The eagerness to participate more directly, openly in patriotic movements was so deeply entwined with an urge to break out of domestic confines and prove their worth in the public domain, that it is virtually impossible to separate the two. It was Gandhi, however, who deliberately brought the largest number of women into politics, or who endorsed their entry wherever it happened, and asked for more. For the first time, we find women of subordinate classes coming into political action, since in earlier peasant and tribal movements against colonial depredations, the role of women had been strictly limited. The fact gives rise to insuperable problems of what to make of the politicization of women under a leadership that was strongly patriarchalist and traditionalist. More, what to make of politicization within a movement that did not focus on gender issues. Can we detach the fact of politicization entirely from emancipation, since the originary intention was traditionalist, and because the movement was not geared to gender problems? There are looped paradoxes here.

Part of the problem can be overcome if we reverse the nature of our enquiry. In fact, the very debates are problematic, since they ponder over what Gandhi or the movements were doing to women, thereby reducing the process of politicization to a question of the nature and intention of male leaders. If instead, we were to ask what women did to the movements and to Gandhi – who, in various ways, changed with the movements as much as he changed them – we have a better starting point.

In the Rowlatt Satyagraha, Gandhi had been reluctant to allow women participants, but some women, inspired by their nationalist families, came out to address meetings on their own. Again, in 1930, he forbade women to join him on the Dandi March, but Sarojini Naidu defied the ban. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya and Avantikabai Gokhale lit the first fires on which contraband salt was prepared. Gradually, women were seen in all political roles: in Gandhian *ashrams*, in village welfare, in picketing, in rural and tribal agitations, filling up prisons, marching on demonstrations. And this included all women – from rich Marwaris to deeply conservative peasants. One can grasp how much of a distance Gandhi himself had to travel when we look at his Noakhali record. For a man who, initially, was unwilling to let women engage in public demonstrations, it is amazing to realize that Gandhi took with him a number of young women – unarmed, unprotected – along with him on his tour of riot-torn Noakhali in 1946, where very large numbers of women had been raped. He was, moreover, a man who would regard rape as a fate worse than death for a woman. I met one of his companions when she was a dying woman of ninety. Nilima Mukherjee belonged to an extremely wealthy landlord family of nationalists. Even in her old age, she was a stunningly beautiful woman. As a young housewife, she had walked with Gandhi through places where rapes had been recent and widespread. Surely, the deepest of inhibitions were overcome on both sides, under the burden of this terrible crisis of the holocaust. We must not, however, deduce from this a comprehensive or unproblematized step towards progressive and emancipatory politics that Gandhi can be said to have taken in his last years. For this was not accompanied with any overt rethinking of gender, nor was this phase without its own internal contradictions: for he continued with his experiments in celibacy, using the bodies and minds of living women. Moreover, the enlarged space for women in the movements was not so much the result of his own expanding vision, as it was of women themselves creating their own spaces. At every new juncture, they would point to their earlier work and insist that they were capable of equally joining in the new agitations. What is more important, once they began to do that, they turned the old nationalist dictum on its head. Whereas Gandhi had directed them to help the men in nationalist politics and not to think of gender issues, they now underlined how effectively and successfully they had accomplished the former, and demanded that their gender agenda should be endorsed on those grounds: they deserved what they demanded since they had served the movement so well.

Let us, then, begin with what women in politics did at this time, within the Congress mass movements. For, mass movements created their own momentum, took surprising turns, sometimes to the dismay of leaders and their plans, and opened up new possibilities. The point is that, women were keen to take their chances as they came, to build on them – as it turned out – without the explicit knowledge or consent of male leaders. Just as with other subaltern groups, so with women, the movement allowed a larger space to initiatives from below when the organization weakened. During phases of repression during Civil Disobedience, for instance, all nationalist men of particular localities would be put behind bars. Peasant women in villages would then emerge as local leaders or 'dictators' and carry on the struggle. Picketing of shops that stocked foreign goods was particularly entrusted to women and children, for the moral appeal would be especially poignant. Demonstrations were either mixed, with women increasingly in the forefront to minimize police attacks, or there were women's demonstrations. Women made and hawked salt during the salt *satyagraha*, they stood by as Congress volunteers were attacked, to pick them up and nurse them, they courted arrests and filled up prisons. Peasant women, at the peak of the no tax movements, would escape with their families to forests, knowing that the police would burn their standing crops and distrain their goods. What is less known is that they ran the households as their husbands were carted off to gaols, and left the homes bereft of primary breadwinners. These acts of support and struggle built up the ground for their later claims to political and electoral functions, at all levels of the social spectrum. When, after

Independence, female franchise was granted, it was given to all women, not just to the propertied or to the educated. The remarkable political skills that women – rural, illiterate, poor – demonstrated in the mass struggles were convincing proof that they were already political subjects, and ready for the vote.

There were points in colonial repression when the police shot dead unarmed satyagrahis: in Midnapur, in Bengal, Urmilabala Paria was the first woman martyr during Civil disobedience, and Matangini Hazra died in the Quit India movement. Both were peasant women. Quit India demanded fierce militant action – pulling up railway lines, for instance, from entire villages. Aruna Asaf Ali emerged as a foremost organizer of the underground activities. At the same time, the Azad Hind Fauz went several steps ahead, pulling women into direct combat action, setting up women's own battalions. Lakshmi Saigal commanded the Rani Jhansi Brigade. Again, the fact that women now filled up all kinds of political functions, down to combat action, explains the formal legal and constitutional equality that came rather effortlessly after Independence.[20]

The more militant and confrontationist the agitation, the more severe would be repression, especially against male leaders. Women would move into leading positions to fill the gaps, and from valued auxiliaries they would emerge as organizers and commanders. Under pressure of crisis points, all political functions opened up, became de-gendered. Yet, the situation would usually reverse once the peak point passed. Nor would the decision-making capacities be left in their hands at any point. So, the decline of the formal organization would stimulate women's initiatives, especially at local levels, but there was no permanent stabilization of that at national or even regional levels once the crisis waned. Nor do we find much evidence that when they did take up leading roles, the nature of the movement changed substantially. Nor, of course, did the struggles articulate an agenda of a radical repositioning of women in domesticity. Gandhi exalted women as ideal satyagrahis, precisely because– or so he said–they were selfless, born to suffering, patient, non-violent. While this gave them a moral edge and iconic status within the movements, they had to purchase this privilege with a redoubled affirmation and acceptance of their traditional image, their woman's lot. In some ways, Gandhi went beyond the rigours of conventional domesticity. Of his close group of disciples he demanded a stern celibacy, even within marriage. That was, for instance, a part of the marriage vows of J.K. and Sucheta Kripalani. He endowed widows with a surplus of moral energy precisely because they were celibate. Volunteers were encouraged to either abdicate their sexuality or be ashamed of it and minimize its role in their lives. Women, again, had always had ascribed to them an innate antipathy for the sexual act and were made to derive their political capabilities from that. On the other hand, the future was always one when they would go back to their homes and their women's work. Separate spheres remained the long-term role and ideal in domesticity, even when in politics, the entire realm was de-gendered. Gandhi did advocate certain reforms. He was opposed to child marriage, and he found the purdah repugnant. These were important departures from traditionalism. Yet, these were recommended on grounds of sexual self-restraint. Child marriage led to a premature and excessive expenditure of sexual energy, and virtuous women could face a world of men since they were fortified with their impregnable chastity.[21]

If politics or the public domain was not to be a place which women would always possess, then what allowed their entry into the political sphere at all? Two significant features of Gandhian movements effectively managed this paradoxical entry. In the first place, the public forms of agitation borrowed deeply from domestic ritual and women's work: charka, for instance, wielded mostly by women, now became a compulsory form of nationalist activity. The boycott of foreign goods similarly depended on women's choices within domestic consumption habits. The symbolic aspects of Gandhian movements drew upon domestic habits. Who else would understand the great significance of salt more than women who handled it for cooking all their meals? In fact, the success of both boycott and Swadeshi would largely depend on what women chose to wear or use. The anti-liquor agitations, again, had particularly strong resonances for women, in terms of their experiences of familial bankruptcy and domestic violence. It took up from a long tradition of female pleas and arguments with irresponsible husbands, and carried it forward as a public collective campaign for national savings and morality. Conversely, what men did in the struggles replicated women's strategies against domestic tyranny; standing up to violence unflinchingly without reprisals. There was a feminization of politics as such, which opened up space for women's entry on terms that did not require a rupture with their forms of work, sensibilities or domestic strategies.

The meaning of politics, too, changed since Gandhi was perceived as a saint, a religious leader, a moral force more than the organizer, diplomat and strategist that he also was. Nationalism was recast as *bhakti*, not politics. It was also a form of sacrifice for the sake of higher good, a form of worship. Refigured thus, this was an arena that was made familiar and hospitable to women since this was familiar terrain. Women had always worshipped with men, had engaged in joint domestic rites for familial welfare and prosperity. The nation was, after all, the family writ large. This was particularly evident in the social boycott of loyalists. The rites of boycott corresponded to the expulsion of disobedient sons from the family bonds, or a loss of caste ties. Here, the pressure generated by the boycott of women of their own men was particularly effective, and Gandhi taught women to defy husbands in this one instance. Interestingly, he asked working class wives to deny sexual rights to their husbands if they went on strike.[22]

When I asked an old widow who had been active in the Quit India movement and had accompanied Gandhi to Noakhali, if she did not find it ironical that after such intense engagement with political activism, she had to return to unchanged domestic norms, she replied: 'The home might be unchanged, but the woman who came back was not so. It was not the same woman who returned to it'.[23] She had gone to prison, she had broken with ingrained brahmanical taboos by living with low caste women, and eating polluted food. Her negotiations with her orthodox family would be long-standing, covert, delicate, once she returned. To delineate changes in this phase would require very careful and sensitive plotting of living conditions, an ability to capture small shifts in small places.

Prisons often overflowed with Gandhian volunteers, men and women. Women from upper caste and class families cohabited with lower caste and class ones, their worlds were enlarged and there were inter-animations. Manmohini Saigal asked Congress women from deeply respectable families to communicate with prostitutes in prison. Of course, tensions and class resentments vigorously surfaced that would not have been so vivid in their pre-political days of domesticity. Again, after such exposure to the wide world outside, the woman who returned home would be profoundly changed. Sir Ismail Mirza informed

Manmohini Saigal that his wife was a more assertive person after her brush with politics. At points of great confrontations with the police, too, there was a certain levelling of privilege: Swarup Rani, wife of Motilal Nehru, and mother of Jawaharlal, was struck down by police *lathis.* On the other hand, if upper class nationalists were seen to enjoy some special immunities after a struggle where subaltern women had been equally active, that would lead to conscious resentments and interlocutions of class advantages that would earlier have appeared natural.[24]

There is thus a fracture between Gandhi's proclaimed ideology of separate spheres and the political equality within his struggles, between what he asked from women and what women came to do, between moral precepts and forms of political activism. An inevitable overspill occurred between the political and the domestic that will not be evident if we focus only on written nationalist texts and declarations which ignored the specificities of gender as such. We need to comprehend the implications of new practices that unfolded slowly and often silently, in the understanding within both political and domestic realms. We also need to look at the new female figures and the new tropes of figuring women that appeared in works of imaginative literature. The striking participation of women in Congress politics, the marches and demonstrations of peasant women from Kisan Sabhas, led to new possibilities in visualizing the woman in the Hindi literature of the 1920s and 1930s.

Even as the fractures opened up spaces for unforeseen, even unintended possibilities for an overspill of political self-assertion into the social realm, there also emerged major constraints that refurbished old images and values, even within a new and heady world of political activism. As much as the woman was iconized as the ideal *satyagrahi* because of her non-violent forbearance, the patriarchal stereotypical idealization of female patience and self-sacrifice was strengthened. So, as historians, we have to engage simultaneously in a reverse process to the one that I have just sketched out: how far the retention of an overall subordination in the political realm strengthened notions of female weakness and limits within the social–domestic. In both respects, however, what limits our understanding of the entire range of complications is a simple identification between the overt message of the leader and the implications of the movement as a whole, a collapsing of the woman's negotiations with political possibilities into the patriarchalist intentions of the leadership.

As we have remarked earlier, Gandhian mass movements did not segregate political functions on gendered lines. Revolutionary terrorists, however, recruited their hand-picked secret activists from young, educated men. Women associated with this enterprise were in supplementary capacities, providing logistic support, shelter, funds, often at great risk to themselves. They were also couriers, running errands and carrying supplies. Durgabhabi, sister-in-law of Bhagat Singh, travelled on trains with sackfuls of crude bombs that she had collected from contacts in the neighbouring villages. While such responsibilities certainly put a different spin on the activities of sympathetic women who were not a part of the organizations, it is also strange that the women who risked their lives in such enterprises had no clue as to how these bombs were going to be disposed of. From 1930, Bengal revolutionaries went much further. Bina Das, a young student of Diocesan College, fired on the Bengal Governor Jackson. At the Chittagong uprising, Kalpana Datta and Pritilata Waddedar emerged as full-fledged comrades-in-arms, joining in attacks, living in disguise or under cover for years in dense forests, or dying during an action by swallowing poison.

Sometimes they took great social risks as well. Suhashini Ganguly set up house with an unrelated man as husband and wife to provide shelter for young terrorists who came to their Chandernagore home.

While the practice made them wrench away from the domestic and the feminine more completely than any other kind of politics, their social understanding changed little. Despite their association with all forms of violence, terrorists abided by strict codes of sexual abstinence, an abnegation of all familial ties, attachments, responsibilities. Women participated in violence while acknowledging its illegitimacy for themselves, portraying it as exceptional sacrifice for an extraordinary cause. Nor did they translate political comradeship into transformed gender norms.[25]

V

From the early, and, particularly the mid-twenties, a few educated women began to work in working class slums in Calcutta and Bombay, to help them unionize and go on strike in times of great difficulties. Sometimes they would work in close collaboration with the Workers' and Peasants' Party, the mass front of Communists, sometimes they would work entirely on their own. Their work involved the breaking down of the most impenetrable of boundaries: of walls set up by class, caste and gender divides. For most educated gentlewomen, insanitary, filthy, disease and crime-ridden slums of the poor and the desperate were not a part of the known or knowable universe at all: if known slightly, they would constitute zones of unimaginable danger and horror. Very, very few men of their class would ever go there, unless propelled by radical political commitment. As women, again, they worked among men most of the time, braving their suspicion patiently, parrying their rough humour with suitable repartees, looking into possible remedies for their living conditions, as well as taking up problems in the workplace. Most of them were young women who would see themselves as exposed to great risks. Manju Chattopadhyaya has collected very valuable testimonies from some of the survivors of those times, like Santoshkumari Gupta[26] who worked among the jute belts around Calcutta. Others have left a few memoirs: Ushatai Dange, for instance, about her work with the Girni Kamgarh Union during the Bombay Textile workers' strikes.[27] There has been surprisingly little work about these early pioneers who opened up unions among jute, and cotton mills and among Corporation scavengers. We know little about what impelled them to enter into union work, since this was largely an uncharted area in the early twenties, or how they made the first breakthroughs, what language they used to communicate with workers, how they opened up space for exotic creatures like themselves in the slums. Prabhabati Dasgupta, a graduate from a US university, found that she gained a measure of acceptance when she shared food with *dalit* scavengers at their *dhabas.* The contact deepened when she replied wittily to their earthy and risky colloquialisms in kind: food and language being obviously the primary markers of class-caste-gender divides, being intertwined with pollution taboos, communication and privilege. Only after she established that these barriers could be overcome in certain contingencies, was she allowed to intervene in negotiations with municipal authorities. The corporation being led by Swarajists at this time, her own class context was a help, in this case. She came to be known in the slums as Dhangar-Ma, the mother of scavengers, despite her youth. The image of motherhood was, obviously, a base of trust and acceptance, perhaps also of a recognition of her class superiority.[28] Women like Manibehn Kare, Parvati Bhore or Ushatai Dange worked with the Communistic Girni Kamgarh union. Again, some of them found in motherhood a common language with women workers. Ushatai achieved unusual intimacy with slum-women when she would leave her baby with them while she addressed union meetings. Ushatai, herself, is a very interesting study. A Maharashtrian Brahmin and child widow from a ferociously conservative family, she had defied custom and guardians by falling in love with and marrying a young communist.

One of the most striking, as well as difficult aspects of their work is that they worked with men of opposite social poles. Women, consequently, were marginal to their concern for union-building, since there was as yet hardly any place for women there. Surprisingly, the women leaders also did not alter this situation. Their contact with slums revolved round an urgent crisis – union building or strike – that left little scope for a more comprehensive understanding of wider problems beyond immediate union matters. Neither were women workers the main social base for the unions, nor were women's problems a priority with unions. So, middle class women leaders did not spend time trying to draw them into union politics or addressing gender issues in slums and workplaces. At the same time, the few records that these leaders have left show traces of warm solidarity and friendship with the women of the slums. Their memories – in quite sharp contrast to the recollections of male unionists or communist activists – are alive with brief personal accounts, stories of human encounters.[29]

Godavari Parulekar's account of landless tribal labourers of Warli in Maharashtra was similarly constructed around a moment of difficult struggle. Sent by the Communist party of India, she organized them against unpaid labour. Her account, nonetheless, is a relatively rare description of tribal family life and homes along with the structure of labour and employment terms. Even as she worked with tribal men, she critically observed and described the witch trials.[30]

There has been some very important new work on women in working class belts of Calcutta, Bombay and Kanpur. Labour Commission reports include a rich archive of women's account of factory and slum conditions, since the enquiry commissions included women among their members and made a point of interviewing women. We have thick descriptions of home life, domestic work, child-rearing and health, sexual harassment at work and domestic violence. Police and administrative records noted the activities of women workers or wives of workers at peak moments in strikes and demonstrations: especially because women were strikingly militant. During a scavengers' strike in Calcutta, they emptied their buckets of night-soil on European sergeants, forcing them to escape from the scene, and using the signs of their "degrading" and polluting work as weapons in the struggle. During the Bombay textile workers' strike, women used customary ways of shaming: taking swipes at noses of blacklegs since the nose was the sign of honour.[31] The vibrant visibility in moments of struggle was not matched by a correspondingly strong presence in unions which contained no women. Despite this notable presence in combat or confrontational situations, women workers remained marginal to left unions: as organizers or as embodiments of problems that the union would take up seriously. No strikes were waged over issues of the absence of creche, maternity/medical facilities, uncertainty of employment terms or exploitation by jobbers, harassment and sexual vulnerability at home and in the factory.

There have been several studies of the marginalization of women activists in Communist movements.[32] Other aspects of their experiences have been ignored, largely because the social and political intricacies of communist lives have been sacrificed in the narratives of Communists themselves – in historical works, autobiographies and biographies – in a virtually exclusive preoccupation with party programmes and lines. Even thick descriptions of their political experience as a part of their everyday lives have hardly been studied. Communist women have thus been doubly marginalized: in Communist and in feminist histories.

It is true that communist ideologues generally prefer not to theorize over specifics of gender issues, seeing them as epiphenomenal, subordinate to class matters. At the same time, the absence of explicit statements blinds us to the highly radical refashioning of communist domesticities, familial worlds, gender relations. In the early years of the party, especially from the late thirties when women joined its various fronts, love marriages were the norm, often in defiance of familial and caste prohibitions. In the forties, there were experiments with living in communes where families would be submerged in larger collectivities. The Students' Federation, dominated by Communists in the early forties, was regarded as a haven for rebellious young women who ran away from home to avoid arranged matches. Unconventional sexual-domestic mores thus were deeply associated with the party, whether the party openly professed them or not. Bani Dasgupta had joined the SF in 1939. She recalls that the party office at Barisal was popularly known as a hive of butterflies, and party women were regarded as no better than prostitutes.[33]

Down to the fifties, the party would be subjected to prolonged bouts of underground existence and severe repression. From the early forties, moreover, there were a number of communist conjugal units which began to have its first generation of babies. Their unconventional family life and political beliefs had cut off their links with the families, and there were great problems of survival, shelter and security for the women and children. Also, the severance of family and kin ties had isolated them from the readily available family bases and kin networks which could serve as launching pads for wider mass mobilization. The general secretary, P.C. Joshi, therefore, advised the cadres – especially married ones – to reintegrate themselves with their families, mutual hostility notwithstanding, since in times of repression even somewhat hostile families would remain as the only possible sanctuaries.[34] Wives became the most important mediating points under the new directives, knitting up wayward, rebellious Communists with more orthodox kin groups, and mobilizing wider support through local, rural or urban neighbourhood constructive work on small scales.

The number of women entering the Party, despite the great risks that were associated with Party work, was considerable in undivided Bengal, Punjab or Bombay. But they were rarely in leading, decision-making positions or in commanding organizational ones. In the long term, the most serious form of gender blindness for a Party with a strong theoretical bent was that women were neither given systematic or serious theoretical training, nor were they at all expected to provide theoretical leadership. This condemned them to auxiliary capacities. Initially, another constraint was the absence of a specifically women's front where they could spread their wings. Communist women worked with the All India Women's

Conference till 1949, providing it with broad mass bases. In 1942, after a ban on the party, the Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti was formed which recruited many non-party women as well for constructive and welfare work. During the Bengal famine of 1943, it came into its own, organizing relief, setting up kitchens, generating small scale employment schemes, and providing rehabilitation.[35]

Communist women – middle class, peasants, tribals – engaged in two great struggles, one armed, the other unarmed. In the Telengana peoples' movement, tribal peasants waged an armed struggle against the state of the Nizam of Hyderabad, and then against the agrarian policies of the new Indian nation state. Sexual exploitation of peasant women by big landlords was a very strong issue for the movement. Tribal women were deeply involved in the struggle but accounts of leaders like P. Sundarayya, show that they were expected to provide logistic support, duplicating something like a conventional division of labour within the struggle. He also admitted that leaders would be unaware of their emotional trauma – about babies left behind, for instance. Feminist scholars have done extensive interviews with women survivors which show that the party pushed back women into a purely domestic existence the moment the struggle was terminated. A schizophrenic vision seems to have guided party perspectives on gender: expecting women to revolutionize all norms to join struggles and become combatants, but to return to status quoist domestic habits afterwards; as if the party was an overarching family, allotting proper duties and functions to its women, depending upon family needs. Only occasionally, under instructions from the head of the family, could the woman exceed her prescriptive role, to serve the needs of the new family.[36]

Ila Mitra emerged as a legendary leader of the Tebhaga movement; sharecroppers' struggles over a larger share of the crop, its transmutation into a cash rent, and the attainment of tenant status in North and eastern Bengal; a reputation that still survives among old peasants of Bangladesh to this day.[37] Tribal women were extremely militant in the struggle, working more or less closely with local party cadres. Being poor tribal women, they were not spared by the police or the armed forces of the landlord, even pregnant women being shot or kicked to death. Peter Custers has noted that they became very prominent when at peak points in repression, the men went into hiding, or were imprisoned. That prominence waned when the Party leadership reasserted its control.

Feminist criticism of marginalization of women by a chauvinist leadership is entirely valid, but it is not the whole story. It also tends to marginalize the wholeness of the woman's experience of the struggle, of her political role, of her experience of herself as a new subject. For many, the political revolutionized the social, for others, class barriers were transcended in actual practice, rather than in theory alone. Bimala Maji, a young widow joined the sharecroppers' struggle as a ground-level activist. Her association with the comrades of the Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti encouraged her to remarry, with the help of her new middle class friends.[38] Despite a number of serious charges about the party's gender-blindness, women recall the times of struggle as "that magic time" or "we were making history".

VI

We as feminists have unproblematically associated women's politicization with emancipatory politics alone. In 1936, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh opened a women's wing, the

Rashtrasevika Samiti. The Samiti set up daily training centres for largely urban, upper caste and middle class women with physical and combat training and ideological teaching. The intentions were twofold: to strengthen the upper caste female body so that the future Hindu sons might be invincible. Moreover, mothers, trained in communal political values, would transmit them to infants at home. The Samiti was founded in 1936, but its women had no role in the mass anti-colonial movements, nor in any women's organizations that worked on gender issues.[39]

As the political situation was rapidly communalized, in 1940, the Muslim League also founded its women's branch, after the League had formulated its Pakistan plan, and initiated mass mobilizations to press for it. It is significant that both the Sangh and the League pulled in their women for political work nearly at the same time, against a broadly similar context of communal mobilization on an unprecedentedly large scale. If the League had gained some credibility for being alive to women's issues, by leading an agitation in the 1930s for an expansion of Muslim women's property inheritance laws that were granted in scripture, but were withheld by custom, the Sangh or the Samiti had entirely avoided all movements for Hindu women's rights. All discussions of a reform of Hindu Personal laws were fiercely resisted by the Hindu Mahasabha.

As Independence approached through a blood-filled holocaust and partition, there were two parallel developments, each pulling women in a different direction. The Constitution conferred full adult franchise, and all women became formal citizens of the republic. There was, moreover, a legal revision of Hindu Personal Laws in the teeth of Parliamentary opposition, especially from the Hindu Mahasabha: even though, eventually a few compromises were made to accommodate orthodox opinion, Hindu women were entitled to divorce, some property rights, polygamy was abolished. Women activists like Hansa Mehta and parliamentarians like Renu Chakravarty had a very important role to play, especially in convincing Hindu women that their gender rights were not an offence against faith.[40]

On the other hand, Independence was ushered in with great brutality against both Hindu and Muslim women. Recent feminist work shows that patriarchal constraints were tightened up within families since lineage honour was jeopardized with the threat of rape and conversion. Fathers killed daughters so that the enemy would not have access to them. Such killings were valorized in collective memory. When the two new states worked out the division of properties, they agreed that abducted Hindu women would be returned to India, and Muslims to Pakistan. This decision – made over the heads of women – remained in place even when the women refused to go back to their old homes, leaving new families to which they had formed strong attachments. What is surprising is that the secular Indian state did not doubt that a Hindu woman can only belong to India, and a Muslim one to Pakistan. What is, perhaps, to be expected is that the woman's consent was ignored by both states as insignificant in relation to the opinion of family, community, state.[41]

Out of the carnage, the uprooting of huge populations, the loss of homes and homelands, ironically, some space emerged for women's initiative: among homeless refugees, women looked for any jobs that they could get, and public spaces filled up with employed women. Other women were particularly prominent in rehabilitation and relief programmes.[42] Refugee women and women from the Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti in Bengal worked together for land rights. The struggles, under CPI initiative, helped prevent the communalization of refugees which occurred in the North under RSS direction. Even earlier, it has been noted, that a campaign against the abduction of Hindu women was moved into a fresh direction for empowerment though franchise and political rights rather than through communalized politics.

VII

We see that women's politics and profound transformations in gender relations went together but the relationship was complicated. Women's politics could be associated with movements that refused to engage with gender issues, or proclaimed a separation of spheres, or ignored the specific needs of women comrades. Yet, the participation would be conditioned by already altered female life-worlds – as for the first women's organizations which came up from progressive, cosmopolitan circles – or lead to altered lives, as with peasant widows like Bimala Maji who remarried a comrade-activist with the encouragement that she received from her women comrades from the Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti.[43] We, however, need to plot the relationship and chart the transformed life-worlds with a highly nuanced and careful attention to small shifts, modest changes, old terms that covered and masked new meanings.

In a relationship with subordinated and exploited groups and the colonial state, that has been sketched out in studies of caste, it has been seen that an alien state, less invested in normative social prescriptions than indigenous elites, may play a divide-and-rule politics with various Indian social forces. In the process, the subalterns may acquire a better bargaining space vis-à-vis the state and their social superiors. Something like that happened to women's politics, too, as mass movements against the state were unthinkable in their absence; similarly, in the presence of mass movements, the state, too, bargained to keep them out of nationalist politics. Moreover, their participation and suffering could later be harvested in terms of political rights, wrested from the nation state. To put it better, a new nationalist male leadership emerged that had been profoundly altered by watching political women and by working with them. A democratic state could only come out of such revolutionary experiences of both men and women. Women's politics were one of the strongest conceptual foundations for the thinking of democracy, just as the earlier struggles over even moderate gender reforms eventuated in an articulation of the concept of individual rights, not entirely contained within the discipline of communities.

We also need to approach the theme with a finely tuned sense of the inevitability of internal contradictions, the often-unformulated social thinkings of mass upsurges that create an illusion of complete spontaneity and conceal the conscious moral and social rethinking that actually fed the movements. Very often we tend to be absolutist and purist in our feminist rejection of anything that does not speak our language in so many words. We bypass the idea of long processes that unfold themselves through shifts and contradictions. Feminists should be more dialectical in their methods.

In a study of political women, we find that gender politics and wider political processes are mutually constitutive, but not in a linear fashion. Moreover, women's politics is not always emancipatory, even though women's work in rightwing politics may help improve marginally the woman's status at home and tilt patriarchal family structures somewhat in favour of individual women at times. At other times, with struggles that may use an emancipatory language of rights and self-determination but still do not engage specifically with gender issues, women may find powerful points of self-identification, that are not always so marked in movements for gender rights alone. Her political choices, then, are not for self-interest or self-empowerment in any simplistic sense; rather, we need to widen the connotations of both the female political self and what women perceived as empowering for that self, which may not coincide with gender issues in an immediate sense. Yet, their stepping into a movement that is emancipatory for subordinated and subjected people ensured that the language of justice and rights would at some points – and in complex, dialectical ways – be universalized to encompass gender equality.

In this mutual relationship, the conventional meanings of politics change, as the cultural and the political, the social and the material, the intimate and the emotional dimensions of life come together as a contradictory whole which requires a non-segmented vision. The narrative of the political woman then becomes as large as history itself.

NOTES

1. For a few of the important writings, see Neera Desai, *Women in Modern India* Bombay: 1957; B.R. Nanda (ed.), *From Purdah to Modernity,* Delhi, 1976; Gail Minault (ed.*), The Extended Family: Women and Political Participation in India and Pakistan*, Delhi, 1981; Hanna Papanek and Gail Minault (eds.), *Separate Worlds: Studies of Purdah in South Asia,* Delhi, 1982; J. Krishnamurty (ed.), *Women in Colonial India; Essays on Survival, Work and the State,* Delhi, 1989; Jana. M. Everett, *Women and Social Change in India,* Delhi, 1981. For more recent noteworthy contributions, see, Bharati Ray, 'The Freedom Movement and Feminist Consciousness in Bengal, 1905–1929', in Bharati Ray (ed.), *From the Seams of History: Essays on Indian Women*, Delhi, 1995; Radha Kumar, *A History of Doing: An Illustrated Account of Movements for Women's Rights and Feminism in India, 1800–1900*, Delhi, 1993; Geraldine Forbes, *Women in Modern India: The New Cambridge History of India*, Cambridge, 1998.
2. The early Subaltern historians argued that when the organized elite leadership of the Congress was fully in control of the mass anti-colonial movements, popular autonomy and initiative would be weak within the movements, and vice versa. See Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society,* Vols 1–4, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982–85.
3. For instance, see Stree Shakti Sangathana, *We Were Making History*, Delhi, 1987; Peter Custers, *Women in the Tebhaga Uprising*, Calcutta, 1987.
4. See 'Intro', in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (eds.), *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, Delhi: Kali for Women, 1987, pp. 1–25.
5. See Gail Omvedt, *We Will Smash This Prison*, Delhi 1980; Radha Kumar, *A History of Doing;* Neera Desai and Bibhuti Patel, *Change and Challenge in the International Decade*, Bombay, 1985, for a recuperation of the accounts of such struggles.
6. Rosalind O Hanlon, *A Comparison between Women and Men: Tarabai Shinde and A Critique of Gender Relations in Colonial India*, Madras, 1994; Tanika Sarkar, *Words to Win: Amar Jiban, A Modern Autobiography*, Delhi: Kali for Women, 1999.

7. Tanika Sarkar, 'A Prehistory of Rights', in *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Religion, Community and Cultural Nationalism,* Delhi, 2000.
8. Sheila Rowbotham has described the failure of much of feminist writing to register adequately the small but significant shifts in consciousness that accumulate in the course of turbulent struggles and movements. See *The Past Is before Us: Feminist Action Since the* 1960s, London, 1989.
9. See Sonia Nishat Amin in Bharati Ray (ed.), *From the Seams of History*; Tanika Sarkar, *Words to Win*; Rosalind O'Hanlon, *Tarabai Shinde*; Meera Kosambi, 'Women, Emancipation and Equality: Pandita Ramabai's Contribution to Women's Cause', *Economic and Political Weekly*, October, 1988; Gail Minault, *Secluded Scholars: Women's Education and Muslim Social Reform in Colonial India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998; Firdous Azmi and Niaz Zaman (eds.), *Infinite Variety: Women and Society and Literature*, Dhaka, 1994; Nita Kumar (ed.), *Women as Subjects*, University of Virginia, 1994; Imtiaz Ahmad, *Modernisation and Social Change among Muslims in India* , Delhi, 1983; Geraldine Forbes, *Women in Modern India*; Ghulam Murshid, *Reluctant Debutante: Response of Begali Women to Modernisation,* Rajshahi: Sahitya Samsad, 1983.
10. See Bharati Ray, *Early Feminists of Colonial India: Sarala Devi Chaudhurani and Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain*, New Delhi, 2002, Radha Kumar, *A History of Doing;* Geraldine Forbes, *Women of Modern India.*
11. Dorothy Thompson, 'Women and 19th Century Radical Politics: A Lost Dimension', in Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley (eds.) *The Rights and Wrongs of Women,* London, 1976.
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CHAPTER 23

Citizenship and its Discontents: A Political History of Women in Andhra

Vasanth Kannabiran and Kalpana Kannabiran

> The last century belonged to women…women who learned to read and write, women who as widows dared to remarry, fighting for the right to education, entering movements, flocking to jails, stepping for the first time into the world of radio, cinema and stage, becoming the first doctors, scientists, musicians, dancers, artists, students. Their courage writ large across the century fills us with a sense of awe.[1]

INTRODUCTION

The soil of what is today the state of Andhra Pradesh has been the site of significant struggles in the twentieth century, struggles in which women were perceived as playing an important part and struggles where they were indubitably at the helm. Looking at the history of women's struggles in Andhra over the last century this article attempts to map women's praxis of citizenship, tracing in the process the various ways in which different realms that by traditional definitions of citizenship theory lay beyond its pale were brought into account. What also becomes evident in the process is the interplay of the concurrent themes of power, authority and patriarchal control defining and limiting women's politics, even while initially encouraging and releasing their potential. This apparent contradiction in patriarchal intent had to do with the fact that women articulated their needs and their interests in intrinsically political ways, while men spoke of women's political engagements in terms of welfare rather than as politics. This critical difference in understanding makes it difficult to locate linear contours of political citizenship unequivocally in the terrain of the public sphere when it is shaped and directed by the concerns of what is seen purely as the private. Women used the spaces that opened up in the public sphere to push forth their demands for progress and change in the private sphere. And there is here an essential difference in standpoint that springs directly from the objective conditions of social existence. In pushing for change in the private sphere, for instance, it was necessary for women to live that change, to transform their own lives in order for the change to be effected. For men, on the other hand, the involvement could be merely rhetorical, in the public sphere alone, and where it did figure in the private sphere it often took the form of accommodating to changes in the lives of women – whether that accommodation was voluntary or forced. The changes in men's lives then, was to a large extent contingent on changes in women's lives, a fact that makes for a divergence in citizenship claims.

In order to be able to map the discourse on citizenship on the ground, the social reform movement is a useful point of departure. How did education, widow remarriage, abolition of child marriages and the *devadasi* system connect to the political mobilization of women first for the liberation of the nation and then for their right to till their land and draw their wages? If it is argued that the ground for political involvement was laid by the changes ushered in by social reform, what are the specific ways in which the framing of citizenship claims will be altered? Should there not also be a reconfiguration of reform itself as something deeply political and radical? How would women's politics change in the inscription of the political? Traditional citizenship theory has always made fine and neat distinctions between cultural citizenship, social citizenship, denizenship and political citizenship all of which are in a sense predicated on the assumption of the validity of the public–private divide.[2] In looking at the history of women's citizenship claims and politics over the past century, it becomes increasingly evident that these classifications cannot but distort the feminist praxis of citizenship that has evolved over the past decade. At a more immediate level, the history of women's political engagement helps us to see the difference in the manner in which men and women perceived and acted upon issues of public concern. It also helps us to understand better women's historical exclusion from citizenship as defined in patriarchal terms. It is this historical memory that must be kept alive to provide an organic link between the present and the public past; our comprehension of the crucial events of the last century is a way of ensuring that the past is preserved to inform our understanding of the present and shape our visions of the future, and if this essay succeeds in documenting a memory for the future, it will have achieved its objective.

REFORM, POLITICS AND CULTURE

Jetti Thayamma (1863–1947) a renowned court dancer in the Mysore Samasthanam from the age of fifteen caused the post of court dancer to be retained despite abolition for the preservation of her art. The *devadasi* system, a practice that was subjected to the most concerted attack by reformers of the nineteenth and twentieth century, had ceased to exist in several areas of Madras Presidency by the early nineteenth century.[3] Where it did exist, the *devadasi* system was subjected to several contesting interpretations, not all of which saw it as entirely evil and derogatory of women. In fact, women from within the community, like Bangalore Nagarathnamma (1878–1952) entered into serious ideological debates with reformers advocating abolition, and challenged readings of the *devadasi* as prostitute. Alongside this, Nagarathnamma was responsible for putting in place the annual Tyagaraja music festival in Tiruvayyaru, and resurrecting radical texts like Muddupalani's *Radhika Santwanam*. An artiste, scholar, musician and courtesan, Nagarathnamma displayed professional skill and critical initiative in her resurrection of this radical text, insisting on the intrinsic value of the work and the dignity of the *devadasi* as a scholar and artist. In this endeavour, she took on Kandukuri Veeresalingam, the father of social reform in Andhra, a firm proponent of abolition of the *devadasi* system who denounced the work as obscene and dismissed the writer as a mere prostitute. The obstacles Nagarathnamma faced in publishing the book and fighting its subsequent ban reflect the ideological shifts in society that served to erase the memory of dancers and artists like Muddupalani. Saride Manikyamma (1910) speaks with indignation about suddenly being denied the right to perform the morning *arati* in the temple, and then being told that she could no longer enjoy the land that was endowed to her by the temple. However, even in an environment in which temple dancing was redefined as immoral, women like Manikyamma did not lose faith, eventually three decades later becoming the architects of the resurrection of artistic traditions that were forced into oblivion by reform.

The larger project of which delegitimation and reinscription was a necessary element was the writing of a "clean" and legitimate history of the performing arts in which the private realm of familial and emotional relationships was reinscribed in terms of an emerging ideal of monogamous marriage and conjugality, and the public domain of culture and the practice of art was cleaned of any overt sensuality and eroticism, cast increasingly in the language of moral degeneration and debauchery. The story of Muddupalani's work raises several questions about the contexts in which women wrote and were read; *contexts* structured by the shifting ideologies of class, gender, empire and nation; questions about *politics* sexual and critical, that determined the impact of their work; questions about the *resistances*, the subversions and appropriations that characterized radical writing.[4]

In asserting their right to the freedom of expression, and resisting powerful and hegemonic attempts at negating their historical place in society, *devadasis* across the board were in fact asserting their right to citizenship in the new nation, as bearers of culture and the heritage of the new land. They did this in several ways – some by completely side-stepping the moral question being raised as central to their lives, asserting instead, that the centre was the public space they inhabited, on the stage and in temples, and the art they embodied, their "private" lives being completely marginal to questions of citizenship as they saw it. For others, the moral question was in fact a distortion of their lives, conjugality for them being defined in terms other than the norm of monogamy that was fast emerging as the only permissible form of conjugality. This view then resisted the reinscription of the private, domestic domain in hegemonic terms and asserted the right of women of this community to patronage and honours in return for their ritual and artistic services. And there were still others who saw in the acceptance of the new ideal, a possibility for active citizenship that might not exist outside of the parameters of that ideal, and thus accepted and propagated reform as the only path that promised equal citizenship to *devadasi* women on par with other "family" women in the new nation.

While defending their right to the freedom of expression, a mark of citizenship, *devadasis* also entered the more explicitly political domain of the freedom struggle where political citizenship was being claimed as a right, putting the leadership in a dilemma, occupying as they did the outer margins of respectability in the independent national imaginary. A commitment to *swaraj* by itself was not enough. The question really was, not whether they should participate or not, as there was no doubt at the time, that every single person's energy was necessary for the dream of freedom to be fulfilled. The dilemma was on where they should be placed in a hierarchical order of respectability. Could they be treated, for instance on par with "respectable" women who were also part of the struggle.

Should *devadasis* be seated separately in meetings that demanded freedom from colonial rule? If they courted arrest, were they to be treated as prostitutes or could they lay a legitimate claim to the privileges of political prisoners? Simultaneously with asserting the right to dignity and respectability for a vocation that was "debased", *devadasis* were also staking a claim to occupy seats of respectability in the then noble vocation of politics, thereby staking their claim, not just to cultural citizenship, but to political citizenship as well.[5]

THE FAMILY, TRADITION AND RESISTANCE

Women's resistance to forced widowhood, domesticity and religious prescriptions took various forms. In attempting to transform or alter their social reality through action directed either at the state or civil society, women were in effect seeking citizenship on their own terms, interrogating in the process the apparent gender neutrality of the term citizenship. The radicalism and indefatigability of women who were active in social reform, particularly wives of noted reformers is inevitably subsumed under and masked by emerging constructions of conjugality, the ideal wife being one who is enlightened and supportive of her husband in his social mission, so that an active fulfilment of the responsibilities of social citizenship is recast in the public imagination as a fulfilment of a new conjugality. What did it mean for a woman in a traditional society to take up the cause of orthodox widow remarriage? Brahmins would refuse to cook and Kandukuri Rajyalakshmi would carry water from the Godavari[6] and personally cook for these marriages. The widows who arrived at her door were often pregnant. She would help in the childbirth and take care of the child if the mother chose to remarry. These were commitments that Veeresalingam, social reformer and "enlightened" citizen was not even expected to make, but that Rajyalaksmi made spontaneously and willingly, perhaps while recognizing that reproductive labour is critical to the sustenance of reform. She worked tirelessly for widow remarriage braving social boycott. The cost or courage involved in that commitment was seldom recognized or acknowledged because it was assumed to be a part of the sexual division of labour, her place being understood far more in terms of the doctrine of coverture than in terms of independent agency. And yet, it has been women's experience that the boundaries between home and work travel back and forth with the women between the private and the public, the home and the world, kin and strangers, obliterating these distinctions and making their engagement with reform substantively different from that of men.

This brings us to the delineation of women's role in the production of an intellectual history of reform. Panikkar argues that intellectual history is not merely ideas articulated by intellectuals of a particular era, but consists essentially of the "moods, beliefs, values and thoughts of members of all social strata".[7] The creators, reproducers and propagators of these ideas however, by virtue of their hegemonic role in the production of ideology and by virtue of their socio-political function are in a position to provide a methodological advance and a more nuanced understanding of historical processes. They therefore occupy an important position in intellectual history. Intellectuals, according to Panikkar, were those people who had an interest in and commitment to progress and advancement, essentially non-conformists who were critical of the existing social order and propagated ideas of change and social transformation. By this definition then, women like Rajyalaksmi participated in the creation of a new social order through propagation and active intervention demonstrating in the process a commitment that was of a completely different order from the commitment of those who traditionally occupy hegemonic positions in intellectual history. Add to this the countless women from different strata, widows, mothers of widows, who came forward to make the agenda of reform real. The anonymous widows who came forward to remarry or those who supported women from their families who wished to remarry in the face of stiff opposition and possible ostracism were women without whom there would be no intellectual history of reform. Unlike peasants and workers, who in Panikkar's view could function as "objects of investigation" without providing a "methodological advance or fuller understanding of the historical process",[8] women "subjects" of reform, particularly widows had to display an active agency in order for the ideology of reform to take shape and acquire meaning. While widow remarriage was universally perceived as fundamental to women's emancipation, its radicalism unequivocally rests in the act of the widow in remarrying, an act that in itself constitutes the production of intellectual history, and represents the ultimate methodological advance in the creation of that history. Intellectuals like Rajyalakshmi then, in a sense reproduce the agency and radicalism of the women-widows through their praxis, which includes and transcends debate,[9] and renders visible a citizenry that has till the moment of their agency, existed rhetorically more than in fact. The transformation from rhetoric to embodied gendered citizens then is only possible through women's agency and political action, which includes their participation in and propagation of reform.

EDUCATION AND EMANCIPATION

Embedded in tradition, family and community, confined by the ideology of domesticity women emancipated from widowhood, and child marriage saw education as a critical tool of liberation. While reformers lamented the fact that woman were no better than slaves confined within the four walls of the house and knowing little of the world, women were rapidly appropriating any public space available to them. While claiming citizenship, then, women travel along the continuum that they must inhabit, and refuse to stop at the attainment of political citizenship alone. In fact, what is evident is the fact that the route women take in fashioning a new citizenry moves from a re-mapping of the private/domestic domain to the public/political domain, so that education follows from family reform.

The first thing that women did when they came into the reform movement was to set up schools for girls, recognizing the political import of education, particularly as an enabling force in spreading the ideology of reform. If the development and enrichment of the vernacular tradition represent a strengthening of the national-cultural perspective that is by definition anti-colonial, and one that makes a conscious departure from colonial education that privileged English,[10] this shift from English education to Telugu, a shift that was intrinsically political, was effected by women who were becoming increasingly active in the field of education.[11]

Education brought the need for advocacy and public support. And women set out to do this with missionary zeal. They set up *mahila sanghams* all over Andhra and organized conferences at the town, district and state levels right from 1897. The Andhra Jana Sangham established in 1901 was an assertion of the rights of the Telugu people. Books, newspapers and journals in Telugu began to appear along with schools for girls. This was the point of emergence of women's organizations. Begum Tayeba Bilgrami founded the Anjuman-e-Khawateen, a national women's organization, while the All Andhra Women's Conference in Guntur in 1910 drew women from all over Andhra where women demanded vocational training since they felt that the ordinary education available to them was of no use in securing a livelihood. Bandaru Achamamba (1874–1905) was a key figure in women's education and writing, having written the first history of women of Andhra, the *Abalasacharitra Ratnamala.* Margaret Cousins who was working in Madanapalle began the Women's Indian Association around this time and began to edit *Stri Dharma* a journal for women. Vinjamuri Venkataratnamma, a scholar and writer started a journal, *Anasuya* in 1916 that she ran for close to four decades.

The prolific writing of the women of this period gains political significance when seen in the context in which it emerged. Education took women directly into journalism and popular literature as vehicles for the dissemination of ideas. Countless women contributed columns and tracts to the burgeoning journals in towns and districts across Andhra. What is impressive is the silent speed with which women began to appropriate public spaces moving from one field to the next carried forth by the speed and logic of liberation. They opened schools, wrote history, political articles, books and demanded vocational training, steadily asserting the right to work outside the home. The fact that women were inexorably and steadily pushing at the boundaries dividing the public from the private went largely unobserved in that tumult, and women had slowly but surely forged a position for themselves as political citizens and bearers of rights.[12]

Women had also begun around this time to enter the professions, teaching, journalism and medicine being particularly noteworthy. Teaching had, through the reform movement gained a fair degree of acceptability, with women being generally seen as more suited to teaching women. In medicine, the rigour of training and medical practice and the impossibility of a clear-cut separation of men and women in the public hospitals, made the struggle of the first women in the medical profession more poignant. Dr. Ranganayakamma, a Gandhian, doctor, freedom fighter and social activist, worked primarily in Bezawada, practicing medicine, setting up a shelter for widowed and destitute women and training these women as nurses so they could support themselves. Her political astuteness in rendering women who were vulnerable, economically independent and socially indispensable through trained professional care of the sick went unnoticed. Similarly Acchamamba was probably one of the first barefoot doctors in India during the Telangana struggle tending wounded comrades in the forests. And yet in her account of her experiences the texture of her experience as a doctor and the revolutionary dimensions of her practice recede into the background before her role as a woman to be admired.

POLITICAL FREEDOM OR EQUAL CITIZENSHIP FOR WOMEN?

With education and the active propagation of reform releasing them from their traditional shackles women moved into the nationalist struggle. When Margaret Cousins and Sarojini Naidu led the delegation to Montagu in 1917 to demand suffrage for women, they were in fact taking the first step in the assertion of women's political rights. This was a significant period in the history of women's mobilization in Andhra as well. Many women from Andhra attended the Calcutta Congress in 1917. They provided shelter to terrorists facing state repression. When Annie Besant was arrested in 1917 in Ootacamund, women protested in large numbers in Guntur, Vijayawada, Kakinada, Machilipatnam, Madanapalli, Bellary, Cuddappah, Chandragiri, Eluru and Tenali. Women flocked into the Civil Disobedience Movement courting arrest and refusing to pay taxes.

The Ladies' Congress Committee was formed in January 1922 and the organizer Duvvuri Subbamma was "the first lady patriot to be called upon to furnish security for good behaviour and to be sentenced to one year's rigorous imprisonment".[13] Women came from all over Andhra to the Kakinada Congress Mahasabha in 1923. Hundreds worked as volunteers. In 1925 the Andhra Sadhavi Sangham was set up by Nadimpalli Sundaramma, Goteti Manikyamba and T. Varalakshmamma. In May 1925, speaking at the Godavari Ladies' Conference, Goteti Manikyamba said that increasing differences of opinion among political leaders were delaying *swaraj*, there was a rise in orthodoxy and conservatism and women had as yet no economic and political rights on par with men. She placed the responsibility of imparting national education, fulfilling the constructive programme and producing khaddar squarely on women. Duvvuri Subbamma, speaking at the same meeting condemned the practice of untouchability. Along with the Andhra Mahasabhas, Andhra Mahila Sabhas were also being held and a forum was established to train women for the nationalist movement. It was evident that women entering public discourse had begun to bring a critical perspective to the movement. The issues of political differences, the rise in orthodoxy, the practice of untouchability and the need for national education that women had begun to raise combined with the awareness of the need for political training for women only underline the seriousness with which women engaged with mainstream political discourse, fashioning a distinct praxis of citizenship in the process.

The single most influential organization in the early twentieth century among the myriad that were set up, was the All India Women's Conference initiated by Margaret Cousins in 1927. Achanta Rukmini, an associate of Margaret Cousins was the first secretary of the All India Women's Conference. Although education was primary on the agenda of the AIWC during its formative years, very soon members recognized the indivisibility of issues and drew the link between education, women's suffrage, "social problems" (dowry, purdah, child marriage and widow remarriage) and colonization. The setting up of the All India Women's Conference coincided with the appointment of the Simon Commission to explore the possibility of establishing responsible government in India. This marked a turning point in the nationalist struggle with nationalist leaders stepping up their demand for complete independence and Gandhi launching the civil disobedience movement in 1930.[14] When Gandhi and Kasturba came to Hyderabad in 1929, there was a special conference arranged for women. Despite Gandhi's reluctance to let women participate in the Salt Satyagraha, Sarojini Naidu took part in the Dandi March in 1930 and assumed leadership after Gandhi's arrest. Addressing a crowd of 2500 on May 21 she said, "You will be beaten, but you will not resist; you must not even raise a hand to ward off the blows".[15] Inspired, women in Andhra began to make salt in Guntur inviting *lathi* charge and arrest. The same was the story of women in Maripadu of Nellore district, near Chinnapuram in Bandar, near Vadarevu in Chirala, Kanuparthi, Devarampadu, Matlapalem, Cholangi, Visakhapatnam, Ganjam district, Nepadu, and the seashore in Madras. Women assumed leadership everywhere. The batches of Satyagrahis who came to the camp would halt at each village they passed through holding meetings. If the police occupied one camp then another batch of volunteers would enter the fray. Women presided over Congress meetings held all over Andhra defying prohibitory orders and Section 144.

After the salt *satyagraha* many women went to jail for individual satyagraha. Sasumanu Sanamma was pregnant when she confronted the police in Rajimanipuram and died in a firing. There were women like Saraswathi Gora who were pregnant and delivered children in jail and women who went to jail with suckling infants. Women marched through the streets of Bezawada wearing khaki shorts and wielding sticks. They visited the houses of lawyers in Bezawada and requested them to suspend practice.[16] Feeling the need to raise the general level of awareness of other women they held political camps. The political camp in Bezawada in 1943 included Indian history, politics, science, women's status, law and reproductive health. It also dealt with first aid, self-defence and public speaking. Women generally felt that these political classes opened up a world of information and knowledge that was inaccessible to them earlier. This was soon after the Japanese bombed Kakinada and Vishakapatnam, and people realized that the British were incapable of protecting their interests. Widespread protests led to violent repression. One reprisal was the gang rape of a political offender's wife by ten policemen followed by ten others. Feelings ran high and in the Bezawada conference in April 1945 almost two thousand women attended walking or traveling by bullock carts. When the first Andhra State conference was held nearly six thousand women attended the public meeting and ten thousand flocked to the cultural programmes. The government banned the State Women's Conference held in May 1948. A thousand women marched in a procession defying the ban. Dr. Acchamamba, Melly Zollinger, Manikonda Satyavathi, Moturi Udayam and Kondapalli Koteshwaramma were arrested. Dr. Acchamamba and Manikonda Satyavathi were sent to Vellore jail.[17] In Telangana, women like Gyankumari Heda, Padmaja Naidu and Brijrani hoisted national flags while women like Sangam Lakshmi Bai worked to propagate ideas of the nationalist movement.

What is evident so far is that once the structural constraints to women's emancipation within the private sphere were removed there is a corresponding change in the public sphere that is brought about by the entry of large numbers of women. This entry however while it is initially quantitative tends to bring in qualitative changes in the movement, changes that are radical in their dimensions and so profound in their implications that newer forms of structural constraints emerge to contain women's political agency. Women had begun to assert their right to leadership and more importantly to assume it. More significantly they were critical of the personal differences within the existing leadership that were delaying swaraj. They pointed to the rise in orthodoxy and the concomitant denial of political and economic rights to women on par with men.

Women as political agents consistently refused to be contained by tokenism and yet newer more insidious and invisible methods of control would emerge to contain their activity. A majority of the women in the freedom struggle settled down to social service and welfare activity rather than to political work after independence. Although service was a Gandhian principle it is interesting how it gently moved a large number of women into what they perceived as concrete work rather than into the murky and tainted arena of politics.

In other words, as long as politics was about freedom, national independence, and political citizenship in the new nation, it was a necessary field for women (also for Gandhi), but once that was achieved and politics now shifted tracks to the manipulations of power within, women were urged to move out of the deeply contentious arena (as Gandhi himself moved out) into the more peaceful arena of reconstruction, social regeneration and civic republicanism/social citizenship. Citizenship thus gendered drew women out of the re-gendered domain of politics back into the gendered domain of service.

THE TELANGANA ARMED STRUGGLE

The struggle to end British Rule across the country was waged simultaneously with the fight against the Nizam's feudal oppression in the Telangana region of Andhra Pradesh. Conditions were different in the Telangana region[18] where both Hindu and Muslim women of middle class families were bound by purdah, requiring of them enormous courage to step out into public life. The Nav Jeevan Mandal with a membership of nearly two thousand Hindi-speaking women was instrumental in bringing large numbers of women into public life. Women from different sections of society ranging from *ranis* and begums to the RSS, Congress and conservatives, flocked to the Nav Jeevan Mandal which provided a forum for them to work together for the cause of women and the country. Active members of the left movement like Brijani Gour, Pramila Tai, Sarju Behn and Yashoda Behn came through the Mandal. The year 1938 marked a new and increased political consciousness in Hyderabad. The State Congress had begun the Satyagraha Movement. Many Muslim progressives and socialists opposed Nizam's rule. Progressive literature appeared rapidly in the 1930s and found its way into the Nizam's state instilling new ideas. The All Hyderabad Students Union formed in 1939 had three women in its Executive Council at a time when women were permitted to attend classes sitting behind *chilmans.* A sizeable number of Muslim women gave up purdah at the cost of being called kafirs to take on public work and along with Hindu women began to speak at public meetings, Mallu Swarajyam, Jamalunissa Baji, Razia Begum, Kumudini Devi were all women who came out of purdah into public life.

Chityala Ailamma's struggle to establish her right to cultivate her own landmarks in a sense was the beginning of the Telangana Peasant Struggle. Rural women were directly affected by the levies and land issues. As Pesaru Sattemma said, "The struggle was for land. Why should the poor be without land? Why should it lie barren?" In 1945 when the Andhra Maha Sabha gave a call for the overthrow of the Nizam's regime the struggles in the countryside against the feudal *jagirdari* system intensified. During the reign of terror unleashed on the countryside by police armed with sten guns, countless women were assaulted and raped in Aknoor and Machireddipalli. The terror was so great that Padmaja Naidu, was asked by Gandhiji to enquire into the mass rapes and submit a report. Women in Akkirajupalli were forced to strip and dance before the *Razakars* and often fled to the forest, leaving behind babies in their cradles. Suffering untold destruction, violence and the death of their children these women survived and still gave away scarce food to comrades who were hiding in the forest and asked for food. Women were gagged, raped, beaten and sometimes burnt together yet remained unwavering in their support of the party. Women had to choose between motherhood and the movement, often deserting newborn infants and undergoing abortions in risky and trying conditions. Kamalamma and Comrade Padma were just two of the many women asked to give away a child; others went through dangerous abortions, which affected their health.[19]

During this period the Andhra Communist Party supported the struggle from outside through training, medical help, fund raising and cultural activity. Dr. Acchamamba, Kondapalli Koteshwaramma, Moturi Udayam were among the many women from the Andhra Communist Party who provided this support. As the guerilla struggle spread across Telangana, many landlords were overthrown. The Nizam's administration ground to a halt in nearly four thousand villages. Warangal, Karimnagar, Nalgonda, Khammam, Medak and Adilabad were in the thick of the movement. Gram Rajyas were established, land distributed, *vetti* abolished, debts cancelled and tenants and toddy tappers regained their rights. In this politically vibrant environment women seized arms to drive back marauding *Razakars.* Women poured into the Telangana Peasant Struggle in an unending stream, strengthening it and spontaneously used strategies in battle that were amazing in their creativity and ingenuity and rooted in the "domestic", adding to their success. They used wooden pestles and chilli powder, carried stones and slings, provided food and shelter, ran guns, collected funds, distributed literature, tended the wounded, surrounded police vans and secured the release of arrested leaders and provided cover for fleeing comrades by loudly mourning a faked death or faking a birthing or coming of age. In Penukonda, two hundred women got together and drove the police out using any weapon they could lay hands on. In Appajipet, the women of the village surrounded a police van and rescued three Andhra Maha Sabha Workers using wooden pestles and chilli powder. Women of Tullapallem village were arrested for supporting the peasants against the Rajah of Challapalli. While the struggle was at its most intense in Telangana the Andhra Mahila Sangham was protesting against Section 144 and for the right to function as a democratic organization in Andhra. Events took a new turn as the Indian Government decided to send in its Union Army when the Nizam proclaimed independence and refused to merge with the Indian Union. The Police Action in 1948, successfully disbanded the *Razakars* but turned its attention on the peasant revolt. Repression increased, the struggle intensified, thousands were killed and the *dalams* forced to retreat into the forests. In 1951 the Telangana Peasant Struggle was finally called off. The rural ethos of Telangana however had radically changed. Women had come out of *purdah, vetti* was abolished, lands were distributed and levy was gone.

What is breathtaking about the Telangana struggle is the resilience, the selflessness and the heroism of women who fought in the squads and rose to positions of importance. The courage of women who provided shelter, suffered in the repression and sacrificed their lives for the cause; the sisters, wives and mothers, who supported the men in the family and moved into the party, the hundreds of women who were part of resistance defies description. The party list of 'martyrs' includes twenty women who were raped and killed.

The question that confronts us is why did so many women from different backgrounds and experiences – some peasant, some middle class and some landowners – pour into the movement in such large numbers? Many of the women from the middle classes had observed some form of purdah and lived lives circumscribed by the kitchen and the household. Confronted with the possibility of moving from the drudgery of toiling ceaselessly for the family into a struggle for freedom from want and oppression, women chose the latter: to live and die in the danger and glory of battle rather than in the safe anonymity of the home. A sentiment echoed by the women in the anti-arrack struggle half a century later was: 'We are bound to die some day. Better die on the street fighting for a cause than stay home and suffer'.[20]

It was the peasant women in the struggle who were not confined to the household but moved fairly easily between the public and private who built up the struggle in the villages against the repression of the Nizam and the Razakars. Faced with *vetti*, the sexual bondage of the *devadasi* system, the assumption of sexual availability to the landlords, the forced levies and the grinding poverty, it was the peasant women who bore the brunt of feudal oppression, and later, during the struggle, the brunt of repression.

After 1944 when the repression increased, many of the men moved to the forests while the women remained behind, holding together what was left in the village. Forming the backbone of the resistance women drew on group support. Realizing that their strength lay in numbers, used traditional ritual occasions like childbirth, death, or a girl reaching puberty to stay together to foil attempts of rape and torture. Drawing on the skills they had and using the everyday objects around them to defend themselves these unsung women in the movement were its strength. The simplicity with which they said, 'we left our pots and ran into the jungle', the inability to describe the details of their personal lives leeched their tales of grandeur and made them sound flat and repetitive.

The promise of equality between men and women, and the possibility of a better life where men and women would work freely together evidently propelled women into the struggle. The backwardness of traditional society instead of holding them back actually impelled them towards the alternative that the movement offered. The walls of the household had suddenly fallen open in response to the political crisis. The moment, and the vision of a new society made it clear that the struggle could not be achieved without women – and without a newer, freer woman, a citizen of a new society.[21]

The involvement in the struggle brought a significant growth in the consciousness of women. Reading, writing, discussing political questions, attending classes, addressing public meetings and organizing often women opened up a new world. The party gave them a chance to make practical sense of whatever learning they had. It gave them the tools to understand their social reality and was a source of enormous strength and clarity. They felt that the struggle brought them wisdom, knowledge, clarity and enormous physical stamina. Acchamamba says: 'I don't know how I did it – it was just the magic of that time'. Dudala Salamma says: 'I don't know how I got the wisdom out of all that … at least you learnt the letters but I've lived grazing buffaloes. All these details are at the tip of my tongue'. Dronavalli Anasuya says: 'It was the Party that made us all human beings'. Women described vividly the liberating effect the movement had on their lives and on their growing consciousness. In public meetings women were fifty percent of those present and the party had to reserve half of the seats for women until 1951. And yet it was evident that the party was unable to deal with the challenge that the growing numbers of women provided.[22]

It found it difficult to absorb these women into its ranks, and feared risking its reputation and in the process alienating public sympathy. Women thus were not seen as individual citizens possessed of will and determination but as responsibilities sometimes embarrassing and often time burdensome. The most serious risk was that the Communist Party would be seen as lacking morality or principle.

Leaders felt that women posed certain technical difficulties. Childbirth was one. Although women willingly gave up their infants to remain in the struggle the party was not yet in a position to address the question of birth control. The other difficulty that women posed was of course the question of sexual relationships. The constraints that are placed on a woman's sexuality in any given society are often an index of her real status. While women during the movement were freely allowed to enter the sphere of political action, they were still measured by the code of the private domain. Not only was a woman's virtue zealously watched but the responsibility of maintaining the moral tone of the entire group rested with the women.

Narasamma, a peasant activist wrote to the party,

> You must coach up cadres properly, even if it means a few more days' delay, so that they can go to the villages with a clear understanding. Especially, with regard to cadre protection, enough precaution and care is not being taken. You must give us books which we can understand. You must take more pains to find such material for us. We women are still being looked upon with the old outlook that we are inferior. Any slip or mistake we commit, our leaders come down very heavily on us. It becomes a scandal. We must be guided and improved not derided. If we move a little freely, we are watched with suspicion. Why have you not allowed any women to participate in actual guerilla raids on the enemy?[23]

And then there is Acchamamba's story,

> They started a story about me. They said I was having an affair with one of the men. I said it was not true. I was prepared to lose my life, but I was not that kind of woman. They said I was guilty. I said I would stand there, and they could shoot me if they wanted to. I asked them to prove it. I was not afraid of dying. If I was I would not have come into the movement.[24]

She was expelled, a pamphlet was issued saying she was expelled and later taken back. A woman who was doing all the medical work in the squad, and was invaluable to the movement, was expelled for what was seen as a moral lapse.

Acchamamba's pain at being expelled for moral lapses and Narasamma's compelling criticism of the patriarchal biases that prevail in the party are echoed almost half a century later by a young revolutionary, who says she and her partner are separating because of his accusation that she is a prostitute. Whatever she says in defense is seen as a lie and a pretense. She reflects that she is perhaps the first woman in the party to be humiliated by her partner but that she certainly will not be the last.[25]

Obviously if political education and training is to be relevant to women, then it has to move beyond the boundaries of the public sphere and enter and assimilate even the normally invisible aspects of the private sphere. Changes in the private sphere influence and impact changes in the public sphere just as much as the reverse. Social transformation is illusory and ephemeral unless the lessons and learning of one area are carried into and transform the other.

It is the ideological construction of the public–private divide that continues to justify non-interference in issues of injustice in personal relationships, that serves to reinforce the codes of conduct that govern the private sphere. While the personal is not accepted as the political in the feminist sense within movements the space of the political begins to coincide with the space of personal relationships. And the code that governs the family operates within political spaces denying and thwarting the political citizenship of women. The identical situation of these two revolutionaries separated by half a century is telling evidence of the inseparability of sexuality from politics. This interlocking of sexuality and politics only reflects the ancient dichotomy of immorality and chastity, which serves to circumscribe women's participation in politics across the board.

POVERTY, LIQUOR AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The Anti-Arrack Movement in 1992 marked the culmination of struggles for women's rights in Independent India, absorbing the perspectives and understanding of women's rights and struggles for democracy of the past two decades on a scale that matched women's participation in the freedom struggle and the Telangana Armed Struggle of the first half of the century. Thousands of women – predominantly of the working class – poured into the streets demanding an end to domestic violence and exploitative revenue policies of the state. The government in power was brought down and the party that adopted the women's agenda voted in. And this victory, for the first time, belonged to the women of Andhra.[26]

Historic is the story of the landless rural *dalit* woman who rose spontaneously, drawing in other women from across the state, into a struggle that spread rapidly like a forest fire leaving the government bewildered and shaken, and its machinery utterly ineffective. Interestingly enough the state and the media initially supported the struggle from a moral position on the evils of alcohol but for the women, the demand to ban liquor was a political demand. Questions of gender and politics, more important questions of the culture of politics, acquire new meanings through this struggle, because, for the first time, the imperatives of working class women (as distinct from women and from the working classes) determined the contours of the political space.

What where the origins of the anti-arrack struggle? On the surface it appears as if the origins of the movement are located in the literacy programme in Doobagunta, from where it spread throughout the state. For those who wish to go a bit deeper, it soon becomes obvious that the lesson 'Siripuram Sitamma' in the *Aksharajyoti* (the literacy primer) was the catalyst for Doobagunta. As the story goes Sitamma, unable to tolerate the ill effects of liquor on the men mobilized all the women of her village to stop the flow of liquor into the village. What was the nature of the conditions that enabled women to act at that specific moment in history, inspired by a literacy primer.

The imperatives of the struggle are located beyond the literacy programme, within the growing resistance to an authoritarian and repressive state that was becoming progressively dependent on the ruling classes. The 1980s witnessed an impoverishment of the masses of rural and urban poor, a sharp deterioration in the employment situation and a rise of 30 to 50 per cent in the prices of essential commodities. In this critical situation, instead of addressing the question of food subsidies and survival issues for the poor, the government introduced new strategies for the maximization of revenue through a shift in excise policy. The Varuna Vahini programme of the Telugu Desam government, introduced in the early 1980s was one such strategy. Arrack, up to that point available only in bottles, was now available in sachets, making it far easier to transport and making it possible to consume increased quantities without constraints of time, since packets could at any time, be carried easily along. There was also a centralizing of auctioning outlets at the district level which led to the emergence of a whole class of liquor barons, whose interests in the liquor trade ran into crores of rupees. Individual outlets at the village level were subcontracted to smaller agents, who adopted aggressive sale strategies. The nexus between liquor traders and landowners in the rural areas made it possible for landlords to pay daily wages in the form of coupons, which could then be exchanged at liquor shops for arrack sachets. In this situation men, in return for a whole day's work, came back home drunk everyday with no money to buy food for the family.

Deaths due to consumption of adulterated liquor were on the increase. Alcoholism increased and even twelve-year-old boys had begun to consume alcohol. In a situation that was desperate, women were left with no option but to resist. The story of Sitamma's protest sparked off the movement. In the period between May-June 1992 the struggle was confined to one village. By July forty villages had joined the resistance. By the end of July, 200 shops out of 864 were closed, and arrack contractors went to the state capital. Women patrolled villages at night, caught offenders, decided punishments for drunken husbands, and unearthed hidden stocks. By the end of August 1992, hundreds of liquor shops were closed in Nellore district and women were swelling the struggle by increasing numbers. The arrack auctions for the coming year were due on 1 September. Different dates were fixed for different districts, thus enabling big contractors to bid in the auctions in any district. Forty thousand women demanded a ban on liquor without the initiative of major political parties. Singing, dancing, dressed in festive clothes, babes in arms, the women succeeded in stalling the auctions and getting them postponed.

Women in Ongole stopped auctions by breaking the barricades to enter the auction hall. Over a thousand women marched in Kurnool to demand stopping of liquor auctions. Aware of the fact that it would not be possible to hold auctions, government officials and arrack contractors reached a secret agreement and signed papers to settle the auction at seven in the evening, even as women were waiting for the auction to begin. When the women realized that liquor would enter the villages, they resolved to devise strategies to prevent the flow of liquor into the village.

It was only when the determination and the political will of the women grew evident that political parties decided to enter the fray. Swearing that the elections would be determined by the measures for prohibition, women broke barricades and bore police lathi charges to enter auction halls and collector's chambers demanding an end to arrack auctions. In a matter of weeks, the anti-liquor struggle had assumed more militant propositions. Women's demonstrations, which were organized by women leaders from Left parties in Hyderabad drew women in thousands.

The movement very soon spread to eight hundred villages, with more than five hundred shops forcibly closed down. Arrack auctions were postponed thirty-two times.

Finding that the auctions had no takers, the government then decided that the excise department itself would take responsibility for liquor sales. Now their struggle turned directly against the government. Predictably the state grew repressive as the struggle spread from one district to another and the financial implications became clear. If the struggle were allowed to continue unchecked, liquor barons would suffer unprecedented losses. Under pressure from the arrack contractors who demanded a refund on their deposits, the excise commissioner ordered liquor shops to be opened. The police and *goondas* were pressed into service to break the protests. The situation grew more violent but the women undeterred continued to picket arrack shops and arrack godowns. This brought threats that the state revenue would receive a setback and rations of rice and kerosene would be withdrawn. Women said they could cope with the withdrawal of the rice subsidy, but not with the sale of liquor, and kept forcing more shops to close down. Their struggle was not only against their men and arrack contractors, but also against the government. When the Jana Vignana Vedika gave a call for statewide movement, women devised strategies and action, in ways that changed from one moment to the next. They crafted the movement as they went along, experimenting with new forms of protest.

The struggle had already made a difference to women's lives, increasing the household savings and providing food to eat. Domestic violence reduced drastically and even men who used to drink acknowledged the change for the better.

The anti-liquor struggle forces us to re-examine the boundaries between the home and the world, between the private and the public and our own assumptions regarding the state. The establishment of a link between rural poor women and the state machinery at various levels, ranging from local bureaucracies to the head of state, is the hallmark of the struggle. Women experienced the structure of the ruling class and its relationship to state structures. They had a new perspective on the violence they were subjected to in their daily lives.

From their experience in the struggle, the women who campaigned relentlessly for prohibition now began to recognize and understand the distinction between the home and the street, between the private and public, as one that is blurred and in a sense artificial. 'Family issues' which included the survival of the household, hunger and the violence of drunken men were discussed and debated on the street. The transformation was evident from the fact that women were now ready to take collective action against errant husbands.

It is in the context of the anti-arrack movement that the campaigns against domestic violence initiated by feminists in the 1970s now acquired a new relevance. The articulation of family violence in the course of the anti-liquor struggle shifted from a middle-class to a working-class context. It also called into question the claim that domestic violence was a purely middle class issue. In this shift the family came to acquire a political centrality and meaning along with caste and class. Gender relations within the family were reconstituted by the very fact that women sat together to discuss problems of survival and domestic violence publicly and also to talk about how they would deal with men who violated the codes of conduct that women were now laying down.

The anti-arrack movement was historic because in fashioning unique forms and strategies of resistance, women redefined the meaning of the political. The struggle was completely decentralized, as was the leadership. The modes of protest, the planning of collective action and decisions regarding the struggle were all taken by women at local levels, and the leadership itself was representative of the intrinsic democratic and popular character of the entire movement. None of the leaders had a vested interest in the movement, nor was there anyone to ask the women to go home after the battle was won or sold out, as was the case in most other mass movements across the world that had predominantly male leadership. What happened to the anti-arrack struggle, however, was that it ultimately got completely hijacked by mainstream parties and was reduced to symbolize the battle for power between the Congress and the Telugu Desam Party, women in the process being dispossessed of their hard won political gains. Considering the fact that it is the liquor barons who control the state and fund the election campaigns it is not surprising that the struggle was stamped out when it did not die on its own. Today, the only remnants of the struggle waged ten years ago are visible in sporadic demonstrations against lifting the ban on prohibition. What started off as a mass movement of poor peasant and tribal women has survived as token lobbying with the government that even today, as it did ten years ago, thinks of the entire issue only in terms of revenue. Women constantly drew parallels between the conduct of state officials and family patriarchs. As they moved from one stage of the struggle to another they were amazed at the stock responses and stereotypical roles of those in power. What remains as the most important lesson of this decade, however, is the fact of women's agency in crafting a prolonged struggle against not only structures of patriarchy in the private domain, but also against structures of capitalist patriarchy represented by the ruling classes and the state with its repressive apparatus.

CONCLUSION

What are the questions that arise as a result of the women's movement today? Are women's issues being recognized as political issues? Is it possible for us to move towards a 'new society' without confronting the problems that relate to the private sphere? If the experiences and problems that constantly come up in our day-to-day lives are not linked to our politics how can there be an increased awareness of these issues? Without such an increased awareness it seems inevitable that woman will move back after each struggle into their traditional roles until we begin to formulate a new politics which goes beyond the boundaries that confine the politics of today.

One of the questions then that these struggles throw up is the nature of citizenship itself. The exclusion of women from citizenship far from being an aberration is integral to the theory and practice of citizenship with the labour and participation of women being subsumed by the sexual division of labour into the private sphere. The ideological construction of the public–private divide is constantly shifting and being renegotiated according to specific historical and cultural contexts. Across the board however, the political education and skills gained in the public world were finally forced to sustain the family, a shift that women experienced as violence: "these dreams were smashed – crushed like an egg".[47] The discontent and deep sense of betrayal that the women who participated in struggles have inevitably felt at the conclusion of the struggle has to do with the gendering of political training itself, which does not recognize the need to politicize the personal by moving beyond rhetoric. It is not enough for instance to state the need to share housework, without opening out a discussion on the ideological basis of the sexual division of labour. That childcare and reproductive labour are not just assigned to women; that men actively choose not to engage in household labour; that women must discipline their families [prevent husbands from drinking for instance] and be disciplined by it [through the practice of domestic violence: 'if your husbands don't beat you, who will?']; that politics for women ultimately boils down to an inventory of individual chores; that domestic violence is a purely conjugal 'private' matter even for women in struggle are all matters of ideology. The refusal to acknowledge ideological intent has led constantly to women losing the gains of struggle. Lister's argument that citizenship is both about women's agency and about structural constraints, is actually about the interplay between the two is extremely relevant in this context.[28] While confronting and resisting social exclusion, discrimination and rigid definitions of womanhood and femininity, women have still found time and again that they have been unable to fundamentally alter gender relations both at the private and the public level. It is therefore politically important to map the contours of women's citizenship as well as the shifts in contours that represent the gains of different struggles, while at the same time not losing sight of the fact that inequalities and discrimination based on gender are deeply entrenched and very resilient to change.

Citizenship has often been located in the 'active, public sphere' as distinct from the 'passive domestic/private sphere.' And yet, this very division privileges men's social experience, and experience premised on the fact of dominance. Even where the groups that are re-articulating citizenship rights are oppressed, marginalized groups, it is a common experience that women of these groups then have to struggle within the struggle in order to register claims to equal citizenship along with their men, a struggle far more complex, because it is not always located in the 'public, secular domain' of politics but in an internal communitarian space that is hedged in with cultural norms and traditional prescriptions that place explicit restrictions on them. Women's claims to citizenship are always located at the intersection of the public with the private, if not at the outer margins of the public or the inner recesses of the private, making any rigid conceptualization of citizenship one that excludes women from its purview. While on the one hand women are crucial to the reproduction of citizens of the nation-state, their position as symbols of the spirit and honour of the nation to be defended in war results in their objectification and exclusion from citizenship. Similarly the women who participated actively in nationalist struggles are gradually marginalized into reproducers of male citizens by the politics of nationalism. The equality principle that is critical to the definition of citizenship applies to women too. But when the question of rights and obligations entailed by status arises in the case of women the emphasis is on obligations. Any emphasis on rights or on equality is interpreted as disruptive of discipline, destructive of harmony and harmful to the integrity of family and community. The family is essentialized and the sexual division of labour governs the interaction between the public and the private constituting a practical barrier to women's citizenship. The barriers to women's full citizenship thus lie within the public and the private in their contiguity and overlap. This public–private divide, which is central to the exclusion of women from citizenship in theory and practice is an ideological construction, one that is contentious and political in nature and which is constantly renegotiated by different social groups. It is this struggle to control the meaning and positioning of the public–private divide that is central to the process of engendering citizenship.[29] It is this effort that underpins the various struggles of the women in Andhra Pradesh throughout the last century.

The overflow and turbulence of women's resistance make it impossible to slot women into clearly definable positions. Political activism is integral to social transformation and is intricately linked to other economic, social and cultural upheavals of the time. If politics is about power and the capacity of social agents and agencies to transform their environment, social or physical, then it is not only expressed in all the activities of cooperation, negotiation and struggle over the use and distribution of resources but also in all the relations, institutions and structures which are implicated in the activities of production and reproduction in the life of societies. Struggles for a full and self-conscious citizenship by marginalized groups at a time when the space for the exercise of that citizenship, the nation itself is being contested, makes the task Herculean, but one that cannot be deferred.

NOTES

Note: This article is based on the work that has been carried out in Asmita, a women's collective in Secunderabad over the past decade, and draws heavily from publications and research carried out by the collective. The texts that the article draws on are: Kalpana Kannabiran, Volga, Vasanth Kannabiran, (ed.), *Sarihaddulu Leni Sandhyalu*, Hyderabad: Asmita, 1994; Volga, Vasanth Kannabiran, Kalpana Kannabiran, *Saramsam* (A Report of the Anti Arrack Struggle); Volga, Vasanth Kannabiran, Kalpana Kannabiran, ed., *Mahilavaranam/Womanscape*, Hyderabad: Asmita, 2001.

1. Volga, Vasanth Kannabiran, Kalpana Kannabiran, *Mahilavaranam/Womanscape*, Hyderabad: Asmita, 2001.
2. See Ruth Lister, *Citizenship: Feminist Perspectives*, London: Macmillan, 1997.
3. Kalpana Kannabiran, 'Temple Women in South India: A Study in Political Economy and Social History', unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Jawaharlal Nehru University, 1992.
4. Susie Tharu and K. Lalita, *Women Writing in India: 600 B.C. to the Present*, Delhi: OUP, 1991, Volume I, p.11.
5. Later still in the mid-twentieth century, women in the Telangana Armed Struggle were campaigning against the *devadasi* system as a form of bondage and feudal servitude that was sexually exploitative of dalit women. And all of these readings of the *devadasi* system by women are in fact representative of the diversity of the practice itself, a diversity that reform could not address. For a detailed analysis see Kalpana Kannabiran, 'Temple Women in South India'.
6. Volga, Vasanth Kannabiran, Kalpana Kannabiran, *Mahilavaranam/Womanscape*, p. 23.
7. K.N. Panikkar, *Culture, Ideology, Hegemony: Intellectuals and Social Consciousness in Colonial India*, New Delhi: Tulika, 1995, p. 62.
8. Ibid.
9. Volga, Vasanth Kannabiran, Kalpana Kannabiran, *Mahilavaranam/Womanscape*.
10. See V. Ramakrishna, *Social Reform in Andhra*, New Delhi: Vikas, 1983, for a detailed account.
11. Volga, Vasanth Kannabiran, Kalpana Kannabiran, *Mahilavaranam/Womanscape*, p. 25.
12. The irony lies in the resilience and elasticity of those boundaries, which slide back into position gradually and unexpectedly, pointing to the deep seated inequalities that circumscribe women's political action across historical epochs.

13. M. Venkatarangaiya (ed.), *The Freedom Struggle in Andhra Pradesh*, Volume III, p. 328.
14. Joanna Liddle and Rama Joshi, *Daughters of Independence: Gender, Caste and Class in India*, New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1986, pp. 33–34.
15. A.C. Guha, *India's Struggle: Quarter of a Century (1921–1946)*, Part 1, New Delhi: Publications Department, Government of India, 1982, p. 168.
16. Volga, Vasanth Kannabiran, Kalpana Kannabiran, *Mahilavaranam/Womanscape*, pp. 28–29.
17. Stree Shakti Sanghatana, '*We Were Making History…' Life Stories of Women in the Telangana Peoples' Struggle*, London: Zed, 1989.
18. Covering a substantial part of the Deccan Plateau the Nizam's princely state of Hyderabad consisted of a majority Hindu population speaking Telugu, Marathi and Kannada. Characterized by repression and a denial of linguistic and cultural rights to the majority, the State of Hyderabad was feudal backwater. The events in this state and those in the rest of the country were in tandem. The Indian National Congress was formed in 1885, and the library movement with the establishment of the Arya Samaj in 1892, the public celebration of the Ganesh Festival in 1895, and the library movement with the establishment of the Sri Krishnadevaraya Andhra Basha Nilayam in 1901.

    The Andhra Maha Sabha which had started initially as an assertion of the socio-cultural rights of the Telugu people began to grow more political in its focus and gradually move from its moderate position to a more radical position. The resolutions in the third annual conference of the Andhra Maha Sabha on peasant issues gained the support of the rich peasantry for the revolutionary struggles of the future years. In the face of repression and threats to ban the organization there were efforts to set up the State Congress. Peasant unrest and protests had also built up in areas like Bhongir.

    With the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 the Communist Party was banned in British India. But it was formed in Hyderabad with the help of the Andhra Communist party and continued to work within the Andhra Maha Sabha until the rift between the moderates and the militants resulted in a split in the Bhongir Conference in 1944. The control of land being critical to the survival of a people 'land to the tiller' and the 'abolition of *zamindari*' were the main planks of the nationalist demands for land reform.
19. Stree Shakti Sanghatana, *We Were Making History*, p. 266.
20. This section draws from Volga, Kalpana Kannabiran, Vasanth Kannabiran, *Saramsam: Saravyatirekhodyamam Reportu*, Secunderabad: Asmita, 1994.
21. Stree Shakti Sanghatana, *We Were Making History*, p. 266.
22. Ibid., p. 261.
23. Ibid., p. 266.
24. Ibid., p. 267.
25. Kalpana Kannabiran and Vasanth Kannabiran, *De-Eroticizing Assault: Essays on Modesty, Honour and Power*, Calcutta: Stree, 2002, p. 215.
26. This section draws primarily from 'The Hen Crowing,' in Kalpana Kannabiran and Vasanth Kannabiran, *De-Eroticizing Assault*, pp. 208–241.

27. Stree Shakti Sanghatana, *We Were Making History,* p. 266.
28. Ruth Lister, *Citizenship*, p. 6.
29. Ibid.

CHAPTER 24

Is the Women's Movement on the Move?

Gabriele Dietrich

What a question! What an audacity to try to write on it! How daunting, how depressing! and yet, how tempting. I hope to be forgiven my audacity as I know I cannot do justice to all the mental and physical energies spent in the movement, to all the lives lived, to which I bow humbly.

I. REMINISCENCES

The request to write for this volume came to me only in the second half of October 2002, during the IAWS conference in Bhubaneshwar. Though I was given only one month time, and this also a month during which I was extremely tied up with many other commitments, I somehow felt unable to turn the request down. This was not only due to the insistence of the editor, but probably due to the atmosphere of the Bhubaneshwar conference. The Bhubaneshwar conference expressed something of the sense of urgency, which social movements are compelled to have in the face of destruction of livelihoods under the onslaught of globalization. At the same time, the plenaries grappled with rising fascism, fed by communalism, fundamentalism, casteism and a technocratic growth concept which runs roughshod over people's basic needs and democratic rights. The Adivasi mineworkers from Kashipur expressed the police violence in Bauxite mining. The Plenary on Gujarat brought to life the horrors of communal violence and the Peace March, which followed brought home to the public the resolve not to take anything lying low.

Shortly before, in September 2002, the Women's Struggle Committee in Tamil Nadu had held three public hearings with the NCW on the globalization impact on women in the Informal Sector which took place in Trichy, Coimbatore and Chennai. The response was so overwhelming that many of the women, who, altogether, counted in thousands, could not put forward their testimony in front of the mike. Only 108 testimonies could be heard in 3 days. The loss of livelihoods in construction labour, agriculture, tea plantations, weaving, fishing, gem cutting and jewellery work became overwhelmingly visible. At each of these occasions it became obvious that we are facing a task of comprehensive transformation, which women's movements cannot undertake on their own.

Many social movements today put forward the demand to quit WTO. They want drastic policy changes. It requires the building of broader alliances, especially with the workers in the unorganized sector, peasants and wider secular and democratic forces, to face the caste and class struggles, to protect land, water, forest from destruction and to safeguard people's access to the means of livelihood, while at the same time braving the communal onslaught.

This realization of the need for wider alliances directed us back to the history of the women's movement. Wasn't this where we had come from: The anti-Brahmin movements, the struggles of the Left, the Trade-Unions? Wasn't this what we had left behind in favour of "autonomy"? Were we coming full circle after over quarter of a century of autonomy? Had we conquered new spaces or had we been co-opted? Or perhaps first the one, then the other? Had autonomy brought real gains or had we lost political acumen and painted ourselves into a corner? Or was it a bit of each of these?

I suddenly remembered my first paper presented at an IAWS conference, way back in 1983 in Trivandrum.[1] I had analysed the participation of women in the Dravidian Movement, the Left, the Gandhian movement. It was very clear then that we truly needed more autonomy.

I also remembered an even earlier situation: the women's conference organized by Social Scientists in Trivandrum in December 1975 to mark the end of International Women's Year. This was just half a year into the Emergency, and women's organizations were flourishing, as they were still perceived as "new" and relatively harmless. Though this was organized by forces close to the CPI-M, a large number of women participated who later were very active in the autonomous women's movement. I have particularly vivid memories of Chhaya Datar, then a housewife and trade unionist, Gail Omvedt (already then into peasant movements but still a Marxist) and Kumari Jayawardena (entrenched in the working class movement in Sri Lanka), apart from Mythili Shivaraman of AIDWA who intervened into the women and housework debate. I myself had closely related to leftist organizations as well as Sarvodaya and newly rising Dalit movements. Later, from 1979 onwards, I worked closely with Pennurimai Iyakkam (Movement for Women's rights) in Tamilnadu and with unions in the informal sector, especially construction workers and fish workers.

II. BURNING ISSUES AND BASIC QUESTIONS

Reminiscing about the history, I was trying to figure out what had become of our most burning issues, the issues because of which we felt we needed autonomy.

1. Violence

The most compelling aspect had been violence against women. The famous rape cases of Mathura and Rameeza Bee, which involved collective police violence, appeared like the tip of an iceberg. This galvanized Forum Against Rape (later Forum Against Oppression of Women) into action, as well as numerous other groups. It was at the point of violence – domestic as well as public – that the ways parted with "mixed" organizations. Landlord raping Dalit labourer was a "welcome" issue in the Left and in the Dalit organization, while domestic violence or comrade raping comrade was considered non-priority or even damaging. It is often said that our struggle against violence has not been "successful" because statistically, violence seems to be on the rise. One then gets the debate whether it is only the "reported cases" or the actually occurring violence, which is on the rise. It is very likely that "real" violence is on the rise, not only in its most visible form in post-Godhra Gujarat, but even in daily life, at home and in the community.

Globalization has led to levels of insecurity of work, destruction of natural resources and cultural polarizations of caste and community which are difficult to handle. Besides, there is also the violence, which has been in the nature of a backlash, cultural revivalism, condoned by police, judiciary and administration. Rajasthan has taught us sad lessons during the Deorala Sathi of Roop Kanwar and the rape of Bhawari Devi in the Satin programme, which was meant to be an encouraging step of a state government to strengthen women's position in villages. Despite all this, we cannot be deprived of the fact that innumerable women's movements and groups have encountered such violence mentally and physically and that our intellectual exponents have dismantled it conceptually,[2] even while spontaneous massive uprisings like that of the rural women of Andhra against alcoholism have temporarily ushered in periods where light, strength and resolve seemed to prevail.

Further South, where we have seen the feminist murdered by militants (Rajni Rajasingham of Jaffna UTHR) in neighbouring Sri Lanka and the female suicide bomber Dahanu in short succession, the desire for a non-violent militancy (in the sense of non-stoppable courage), yet able to survive, has been strong in ordinary women of the working classes. We also thankfully remember that some of us have extricated themselves from violent personal circumstances and have been able to rebuild their lives in astonishing ways, even though the support systems in the women's movement itself often appeared inadequate. I always have to think of Flavia Agnes when I say such things, who managed to get out to become a lawyer and make the connections between domestic and communal violence.[3] Unfortunately, under the impact of communalization of politics, there has been significant deterioration of women's situation regarding violence. The attempt of the BJP to push a Bill on domestic violence which legitimizes violence if it is only occasional or "in defence of property", has been opposed tooth and nail by the women's movement and the Lawyers Collective has formulated a comprehensive alternative to this Bill.

2. Religion, Communalism, Fundamentalism

This connects with the second great debate and practical challenge, which started in the early eighties and intensified after the anti-Sikh riots in 1984, in the wake of the assassination of Indira Gandhi and after the Shah Bano judgement in Indore. This was the debate on women and religion and the aborted struggle for a gender just family law. This debate deepened into an attempt to understand religious identities and women's absorption into the communal mindset. Simultaneously we had to confront the reality that we are divided not only by religion, but also by caste and untouchability.

We had to confront the fact that many women in the movement were of a mindset which has sometimes been called "secular fundamentalism", i.e. having no sensorium to relate to religion, but often claiming the majority religious mindset as a secular culture. We had the double task of relating to religion after the anti-Sikh riots and at the same time raising the question whether the women's movement itself could be a force against communalism and fundamentalism.[4] A few years down the line, after the destruction of Babri Masjid, we had to admit that women themselves were active participants in communal violence, as perpetrators, not as victims.

We also had to face the fact that caste and untouchability were a reality, which we often did not know how to confront,[5] that especially in rural situations, caste and community identity can be much stronger than women's solidarity. Despite all this, there have been the quiet victories. Mary Roy, after all, defeated the Syrian Christian Succession Act, even though she did not get her land back. The Christian Marriage and divorce Act of 1869 has been reformed in a gender just way and Muslim women, even under the most adverse circumstances, have been getting maintenance in secular courts, despite all the negative fallout after the Shah Bano Judgement.

3. In Search of Our Bodies

While the struggle against violence and for maintenance (including the rights not to be thrown out of a house and more generally, women's participation in struggle for housing rights) has been of very elementary survival nature, the women's health movement has been of special relevance to claim rights over our own bodies. The title of this paragraph is taken from one of the first books published by the women's health movement[6] on women and reproductive rights, including foeticide and infanticide and the need to redefine sexuality. All these issues have branched out into separate campaigns over the year: Struggles against Depo-Pravera and injectables, the attempts to stop sex-determination and sex-selection and curbing the misuse of the PNDT Act, while at the same time not jeopardizing women's access to safe abortions.[7]

The struggle for alternative sexual practices and the need to recognize different sexual preferences have remained low key. I remember a workshop on sexuality which I conducted way back at the Patna conference of the autonomous women's movement in 1988 which was crowded with Dalit women from Tamilnadu, fishing community women from Kerala, Adivasis from Bihar and Orissa, in which we translated from altogether 18 languages. This did not stop our Marxist Leninist friends from calling the discussions of the workshop as "decadent bourgeois middle class". Such denunciations did not prevent women from quietly slipping into a room where they were taught gynaecological self-examination, while others pinned lesbian contacts on to a notice board.

While earlier campaigns were against damaging drug use, the health movement has gone ahead to recapture women's knowledge systems regarding herbal medicines, pre- and post-natal care, and connecting with women's traditional knowledge of agriculture.[8]

4. Resources, Work, "Development"

This brings me to the fourth major aspect of our experiences and our debates: the survival struggles related to work and to natural resources which are connected with the struggle for alternative development. It is true that even the three struggles mentioned earlier are addressing survival issues: physical integrity and a rightful place in family and community are clearly a pre-condition for "staying alive". However, Vandana Shiva's seminal book in the late eighties has raised the question of destruction of nature, women's knowledge systems and work skills by a patriarchal system of science and technology in pertinent ways. Though there have been disagreements regarding eco-feminist "essentialism" in her argument, the question of women's relation with forest, agriculture, water and fisheries has stayed with the women's movement in a central way. My own experience in this respect was with the fish-workers movement in Kerala and parts of Tamilnadu. Even though women are not allowed to enter the sea, the strong participation of women in the fish-workers movement has raised very fundamental issues about "the rape of women and the rape of the sea", connecting the different spheres of violence from the domestic level to the market and the technocratic development interventions, which have depleted the resource.[9] Besides, the women's struggle in the fish-workers movement also relates us back to the initial question with which this paper opened regarding the position of women in the so-called "wider" struggles for total transformation of society.[10]

To elaborate on this question a bit further, I would like to go into a case study, which compares an urban, and a rural struggle, both of which have become more acute due to globalization. This will help us to understand where such joint struggles between women's movements and unions or other mixed movements stand at the present juncture and what this means for the position of women in alliance building.

5. The Organizational Question

This case study may also shed light on a question which is under-discussed and not sufficiently addressed in the women's movement: the organizational question. If total transformation in order to be democratic, needs mass participation, then how to build or at least relate to mass organizations is very important. This is not to underestimate the myriad of small experiments which have been going on everywhere and which have been a ferment of transformation.

Yet, we need to admit to ourselves that the toiling masses can best be reached through issues related to their toil and struggles regarding land, water, forest and right to work and basic amenities. In the urge to create new spaces and institutions, the women's movements have often been confined to setting up projects and thus becoming NGOized. Apart from this, many feminists have been inclined to use government channels like the Women's Development Programme in Rajasthan and the Mahila Samakya Programmes in different states. While this was indeed a shortcut to very wide interaction at the village level, it made the movement to some extent dependent on the State, while the State itself, as we all know, cannot be relied upon to be truly interested in women's liberation.

One of the latest pitfalls in this context, have been the self-help groups, designed to draw women into the capitalist-consumerist economy more actively. As it is the State who has control over loans, any protest can be quelled easily by discretion in giving loans. Even NGOs who have worked on self-help schemes independently, and in a critical perspective, are facing difficulties with their members decamping into a "safer", protest-free environment. While women have been in the forefront of many working class struggles, from the storm of the bakery shops in the French Revolution onwards, the need to keep the hearth fires burning, to bear and bring up children, side by side with the daily toil of wage labour, puts us in front of the dual difficulty: to protect and sustain autonomous spaces, but simultaneously to relate to the ongoing survival struggles where we inevitably have to cope with male leadership.

In our urge to build and protect free spaces, we have often been in danger of losing our political acumen. The socialist inspiration of many pioneering feminists in the seventies has lost its sparkle. Our minds have silted up in the daily struggle to sustain the nitty gritties of projects and interactions. In the nineties, the collapse of Eastern Europe and the Chinese state capitalist miracle have numbed our political imagination. Holding on to Cuba and Fidel, the bearded bachelor, appears to be too little too late. The revolution is clearly no longer what it once was. I have written on this more extensively in a paper presented in the workshop before Bhubaneshwar Conference on "Loss of Socialist Vision and Options Before the Women's Movement".[11]

I am going into the two case studies in order to show that alliance building is necessary and possible and that the hard won autonomy has not been in vain and need not get lost.

III. CASE STUDIES

1. Conceptual Framework

These two case studies cover an urban and a rural situation. They deal with an organizational perspective of "mixed" movements which at the same time work in close alliance with relatively autonomous women's movements. They do need to be placed in the context of globalization. In the urban situation, globalization has contributed to "urban removal" – the pushing out of slum dwellers from localities close to their workplace, the eviction of vendors from central places in the city. In the rural situation, promotion of intensive aquaculture has led to destruction of agriculture and unemployment among agricultural labourers, mostly Dalits. In both situations the struggle evolves around issues of right to work and to spaces to live and work in. Thus, the question of natural resources like land and water is closely connected with the right to work and the right to dwelling.

Apart from taking into consideration the effects of globalization on labour and on the destruction or alienation of the resource base, I would also like to relate back to the conceptualization of Rosa Luxemburg regarding the perpetual re-creation of colonies by capitalism and the realization that such colonies are not only external but also internal.[12] While the women's movement has acknowledged women as "the last colony", it has not invested much imagination into the understanding that there are a variety of internal colonies whose situation deteriorates under globalization. Such colonies consist of Dalits, Adivasis, workers in the informal sector and indeed, women. The contention of this paper is that these internal colonies need to ally with each other in order to gain the strength to overcome their oppressive and exploitative situation. Such alliance building broadens our understanding of the connection between subsistence labour and wage labour and broadens the concept of what is production.

This alliance building is by no means easy, as each sector and each movement is pre-occupied with the logic of its own demands and dynamisms, which is also very legitimate. Adivasi movements are closer to the struggle for the resource base and protection of subsistence production. Dalits, many of whom have been traditionally landless, have been cut off from the resource base, as even water was withheld from them, though they traditionally also managed irrigation systems. Their focus is therefore on human right violations and untouchability. Unions in the unorganized sector focus on labour issues. While many of their members are Dalits and Adivasis, their voices are not taken to represent these sections. Women overlap all sub-sectors and are therefore under the pressure of multiple identities while struggling to affirm a specific common identity as women, which is at the root of the quest for autonomy. At the same time, the emphasis of the class struggle has shifted from organized labour to the informal sector. Many workers have shifting employment and multiple skills. In movements like *Narmada Bachao Andolan*, Adivasi subsistence farmers have allied with the prosperous farmers of the Nimad, while at the same time Dalit landless labourers, boatmen and fisher people are an integral part of the struggle. We have to explore forms of organization, which transcend the narrow traditional boundaries and incorporate the experiences of all sectoral struggles, which are also connected with ecological struggles. At the same time we also have to find forms to accommodate labour, which floats between sectors and forms a labour pool, which works on different jobs at different times and therefore does not clearly belong to any one particular labour board. We also have to come to terms with caste and class divisions within the women's movement.

2. Women in People's Movement

The urban based organization Pennurimai Iyakkam (Movement for Women's Rights) is a women's organization which works among urban poor in Chennai, Madurai, Trichy, Coimbatore and in several rural pockets in the vicinity of these cities. This movement has been built in close relationship with a Construction Workers Union since the late seventies. The rural movement is the Gram Swaraj Movement (village self-rule movement), which has organized landless labourers and small peasants on the land question in the Cauvery Delta in East Thanjavur and Nagapattinam Districts of coastal Tamilnadu. This region, which was earlier known as the rice bowl of Tamil Nadu, is now scarred by prawn farms, which have been promoted since the mid-eighties. Over the past ten years, this region has seen a vigorous struggle against intensive aquaculture. The other important component of Gram Swaraj Movement is a protracted struggle against illicit liquor and for total prohibition. The movement has a very strong women's wing.

This case study argues that a renewed deep alliance between women's struggles and workers and peasants' struggles in the unorganized sector has come about under the pressure of globalization. It is necessary to critically analyse the nature of integration between women's and workers' struggles and to understand the common issues arising between urban and rural situations.

An attempt will be made to give a brief history of each of these above-mentioned movements and the commonality, and the partial convergence of their struggle against globalization will be worked out. An attempt to understand the emerging alliances conceptually in the light of some of the more recent discussions on social movements will also be-made.

3. Pennurimai Iyakkam and Construction Workers' Struggle

The Beginnings

The P.I. and the construction workers union, which was first formed under the name of Tamil Manila Kattida Tozhilalar Sangam, both date back to the later seventies. Both were registered (under Societies Act and Trade Union Act respectively) in 1979. Both have been researched and documented earlier but each has been dealt with separately.[13] In the study on the women's movement by Eldrid Margeli, the intrinsic connection between the women's movement and the union has not been made visible, leave alone been analysed. It has been completely missed out. On the other hand, in the study on the Union, though the position of women has been very explicitly analysed, the availability of a back up in the shape of the women's movement has also not been discussed. A complicating factor arises out of the fact that the union had split in 1993 and was then reconstructed by its former Women's Wing Secretary R. Gita as part of Kattida Tozhilalar Panchayat Sangam, a National Union registered in Delhi. This split occurred when the impact of globalization was first felt in the early nineties and the democratic fabric of the country was frayed due to the destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya by the Hindu communalist forces. The break occurred on questions of militancy in a situation of eroding democratic spaces and also on the role of women in the union. Gita's article of 1989 traces the history of the Union. It shows the wide gap between the social and economic contribution of the industry and the abysmal condition in which the workers have been living.

In 1989, there were 25 lakh construction workers in Tamilnadu approximately 2 crores (20 million) in the whole country. The trend is going down. It is anticipated that from the present 22 lakhs, the workforce of construction labourers in Tamilnadu will go down to one tenth of its strength due to mechanization. This is all the more grave, as due to mechanization in agriculture and import liberalization of agricultural goods, the rural workforce faces rampant unemployment as well. Normally, rural workers found the construction sector as a natural refuge during the lean seasons. Once this refuge is destroyed, destitution will be rampant. Both these problems affect women more than men, as many more female workplaces get lost. Castewise, it is the Dalit population who traditionally worked as agricultural labourers and as Chitthaal (small person), the term used for the so called "unskilled" labour in construction work which involves mainly the lifting and carrying of construction materials such as bricks, mortar, water and sand. This is done by balancing head loads while climbing shaky ladders at frequent intervals. Obviously this requires a lot of dexterity and stamina but the skill is not acknowledged.

Union Struggle

The struggle of the union led to state level legislation and the national federation which came into being under the name of NCCCL (National Campaign Committee for Comprehensive

Legislation in Construction Labour) has been fighting for national legislation for regularization of employment and implementation of basic social security like accident compensation, health care, stipends for children, maternity leave, child care, financial assistance for marriage and in case of death, as well as pension schemes corresponding to 20 days of daily wage. Over the years, after massive struggles and agitations, two National Acts on construction labour have been passed, facilitating the establishment of tripartite boards. However, the struggle for implementation of these boards is going on unabated.

These struggles have also led to the passing of the Tamil Nadu Manual Labourers' Act of 1982, which has envisaged similar boards for other informal sector labourers. After this, it took many years of struggle before schemes were passed in 1994 for implementation and only in 1999, 54 new occupations were recognized under the Act which are now in the process of being registered under the Board. However, this process of fresh unionization, brought about by relentless struggle, coincides with the process of globalization where over the past four to five years increasing mechanization has started to affect the workforce adversely. The spreading of digging machines and the use of imported ready mix cement have drastically affected the availability of employment. Due to this, the Coimbatore unit of the union from September 2001 onwards started a protracted struggle against Larsen and Toubro which however remained without substantial success.

The P.I. History and Housing Struggles

Let us now side by side look into the development of the women's movement in order to understand how globalization has made itself felt among women slum dwellers. The P.I. was founded side by side with the Union in 1979. The P.I. was originally an activist organization in which a middle class core group had tried to form a mass organization, tackling culture-related issues of women's oppression alongside survival issues like housing, basic amenities as well as domestic violence. I remember that one of the first demonstrations was in front of the British High Commission against virginity tests in Heathrow airport used on Indian women travelling to the U.K. to join their betrothed to get married, certainly no mass issue, but a cultural issue related to neo-colonial forms of discrimination.

The handling of housing issues and basic amenities which was taken up side by side related directly to the immediate situation of slum dwellers and catered directly to the survival issues of women construction workers. So did the handling of issues of domestic violence and sexual harassment, which also came up in the movement. In the mid-eighties, the P.I. got involved with evictions of fish workers on the Marina, where *kattamarams* (small fishing boats made of tied up tree trunks) had been forcibly removed from the shore. However, the women activists did not have the stamina to form a fish-workers union at that point. They kept working closely with the construction workers union. Eldrid Mageli, who had studied the P.I. during the eighties, points out the anti-colonial cultural position from the outset and also dwells on the involvement with slum issues. As she studied the movement under the aspect of "political behaviour of women", she completely missed out on the union connection. She noticed that the organization had about 5000 members during that period but did not discover that this was partly due to the fact that, e.g. the housing struggles and struggles for basic amenities served the interest of slum dwellers who were at the same time organizing themselves in unions in the unorganized sector. Mobilization in the mid-eighties reached up to 20,000 members.

Encountering the World Bank

The impact of globalization made itself particularly felt during the early nineties when World Bank (WB) projects for urban development started to affect slum dwellers in drastic ways. From 1992 onwards, a WB project in Madurai promised the cleaning up of nine canals with a view to city beautification and restoration of flow of water.[14] This sounded all very ecological and attractive to middle classes, as Madurai was supposed to become a Singapore. One has to understand that housing issues – evictions, resettlement, basic amenities – were the lifeblood of the Madurai section of the movement.

The Madurai branches had first taken off in a large way at the end of 1985, when both in Chennai and in Madurai exhibitions in slum areas were run under the slogan: "*One Bhopal is Enough*". This was to commemorate the Bhopal Gas Disaster of Dec. 3, 1984 – the biggest industrial accident in human history, one year after.[15] This brought out a perception in the slum dwellers that "development" went vitally against the survival interests of the poor and that MNCs and international institutions could not be trusted. The movement had succeeded during that year to get a stay order against evictions without prior resettlement and thus, the Madurai unit was formed by staying evictions and achieving, in some of the cases, resettlements.

The next jolt, which galvanized the movement into activity, was in 1993 when just before Deepavali, the tank wall of Sattayur tank was breached which led to rampant floods in several parts of town. Investigations showed that, though it had indeed rained heavily, the breach was man made and executed without prior warning. Between Deepavali and Pongal (Dec. 1993 to Jan. 1994) rampant evictions took place. This led to long drawn struggles for compensation and resettlement, which affected about 5000 families in different localities. As it turned out later, this was indeed an introduction to the above-mentioned World Bank Scheme, which aimed at removing people from the canal banks of Madurai. This World Bank Project was planned and executed with secrecy. It envisaged to clean up nine canals in the city and to remove people bit by bit. With a lot of effort the activists managed to lay their hands on the plans but were misled by the administration all the time. Evictions took place step by step, often without warning and resettlement. In some cases, even when resettlement was attempted, people returned to their original places, as they needed the work opportunity (household labour, vending, cycle rickshaw plying, construction labour) in the locality. Over the years it slowly leaked out that rampant misappropriation of funds had taken place and that in some localities people had been settled which were never affected by eviction.[16] When the corruption was made known by letters to the World Bank, the project stopped. The main effect has been an increase in mosquito population in some of the canals. Otherwise, very little has changed.

Wider Alliances

Interestingly, in terms of growth of people's movements, encountering the WB in this fashion also led to an alliance with the far away Narmada Bachao Andolan, a massive people's movement against big dams in the Narmada Valley in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra, which had succeeded to drive out the WB from funding the Sardar Sarovar Project in 1993. This was the same time when WB project affected the Madurai P.I. members. Despite long distances, this contact later fed into the formation of National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM) from 1995 onwards. The NAPM consists of over 150 people's movements led by Narmada Bachao Andolan, National Fish workers' Forum, Samajwadi Jana Parishad, Sarva Seva Sangh and many others. Apart from fighting globalization, NAPM has also put forward the demand to quit WTO.

The Historical Padayatra

Apart from these wide alliances mentioned above, the union work itself also branched out. As mentioned earlier, the Tamilnadu Assembly had passed the Tamilnadu Manual Labourers Act way back in 1982 as a result of extended workers' struggles. Later in 1994 schemes were passed and in 1999, 54 new occupations were recognized under this Act. This led to a spirit of fresh unionization in order to register under the labour board. However, even the registration process itself was obstructed by the administration and the budget of the state did not reserve funds to implement the welfare measures.

Due to this, 32 organizations came together in an Action Committee for Unorganized Labour in December 2001 to organize a Padayatra from Kanyakumari to Chennai (850 km) to be walked in fifty-three days, from March 8th International Women's Day to May 1st International Workers' Day. This *padayatra* covered 12 districts and held public meetings in numerous villages and towns on the way. On most days, people walked 20 to 25 km in the blistering heat. The struggle was led by the KTPS (NMPS) and the P.I., but had wide support from Domestic Workers' Union, Gandhian Organizations and other unions in the informal sector. The padayatra had a wide range of demands, including each sector, but also many general demands:

- Recognize informal sector labourers as being below poverty line.
- Reserve funds for the Labour Boards in the State Budget.
- Registration of workers and employers in the board and implementation of minimum wages and comprehensive social security.
- 2% levy from each construction to be collected by the Board.
- Registration through unions only.
- ESI, pension scheme, 3 months maternity benefits, monsoon allowance, provident fund, Rs. 50,000/ for natural death, 2 lakhs for death in accident.
- Education for workers' children, crèche, housing schemes.
- Measures against child labour in rice mills, brick kilns, weaving.
- Abolition of bonded labour.
- Throw out MNCs, resist globalization, privatization, liberalization.
- Quit WTO.
- Stop mechanization.
- Protect street vendors.
- Stop evictions of slums.

- Distribute one acre to each agricultural landless labourer's family.
- Distribute wastelands and poramboke lands.
- Safeguard women's participation in the labour board.
- Build labour board for agricultural labour from local levels up to block, district and state level.
- Total prohibition.
- Besides, many specific demands for different occupations were joined.

One of the most remarkable discoveries during the padayatra was that agricultural labourers and small peasants who were organizationally under-represented in the campaign, spontaneously responded and joined the struggle against globalization. The final rally, attended by about 6000 workers, got the support from peasant movements in Madhya Pradesh and of Coal Workers' Union in Dhanbad, Bihar. A.K. Roy, the veteran Leftist Jharkand leader, joined in the final manifestation. The other significant aspect is that Krishnammal Jaganathan, veteran leader of Gram Swaraj Movement, not only opened the padayatra in Kanyakumari on 8th March, but also led the rally on May 1st. This leads us directly into the alliance between the urban and rural struggles against globalization.

4. The Gram Swaraj Movement

Early History

The second example of a movement, which has been jolted into struggle against globalization, is that of the Gram Swaraj Movement, centred in Vinobha Ashram in Kuttur in Kizhvalur Taluk of Nagapattinam district. This movement which was founded by two freedom fighters, S. Jaganathan and his wife Krishnammal,[17] who are today ninety and seventy-six years old respectively, started off in the early 1970s, after the wage struggles of agricultural labourers had led to the burning of 44 Dalits in a hut on Dec. 25th 1968, most of them women, children and old people. This violence incident which has gone down as a much remembered historical event among both, communists and Dalit movements, called the Kizhvenmani incident, challenged the Gandhian leaders who had been in the struggle for Bhoodam with Vinobha Bhave, to start struggle for land agitation in this area.[18] They started off camping in the villages and organizing landless labourers, especially women. While the Communist Party Marxist (CPI-M) and also partly the CPI, had organized landless labourers as well as women in this area on wage struggles, it had not tackled the land question. The agricultural contradictions had sharpened due to the introduction of Green Revolution. In the period from early seventies to early nineties, the movement took roots in numerous villages.

During the mid-seventies, the two freedom fighters joined Gandhian leader Jayaprakash Narayan in his struggle against the Emergency and for total revolution. They involved in the Bhudgaya Movement in Bihar, which became famous for distribution of temple lands and involvement of women in struggle for land rights.[19] They were arrested during the Emergency rule of Mrs. Gandhi between 1975 and 1977 and S. Jaganathan went to jail in Tamilnadu. After that, they continued their struggle for village self-rule in the Kizhvenmani area.

There is a remarkable continuity in the history of the Gram Swaraj Movement, as the pre-independence anti-colonial struggle links up directly with the anti-globalization struggle during the nineties. The historical link is established not only by the focus on intervention of foreign companies and distorted development objectives, but the continuity is constituted to a large extent by the struggle for "land to the tiller" and very comprehensive constructive work programmes. Jaganathan was part of Vinobha Bhave's Bhoodhan Movement and effected distribution of 100,000 acres to 32,000 landless families in Tamilnadu. He and Krishnammal did intensive development work near Bathalagundu in Madurai district from 1956-68 until the Kizhvenmani incident effected the shift to Nagapattinam area in East Thanjavur (later Nagai Quaid-E-Milet district). Jaganathan and his wife also led struggles for temple land distribution against Madurai Meenakshi Amman Temple. They worked closely with Jayaprakash Narayan during the famous Boudhgaya movement in Bihar in which 25,000 acres of land (out of 30,000 acres controlled by the Matt – the largest Hindu Monastery in Boudhgaya). This struggle has been significant for its women's participation and distribution of land to women. From 1981 onwards, they formed an organization LAFTI (Land for the Tillers) which was devoted to purchasing land for distribution in one-acre plots, with the aid of bank loans and government subsidies. Apart from land distribution, housing schemes and building of small village industries as well as purchase of milk-cattle was also implemented. However, this did not prevent the movement from fighting the government on its cheap liquor policy and taking very militant anti-government stand when required.

Gram Swaraj Takes on Intensive Aquaculture

The situation in Nagapattinam and adjacent districts changed incisively during the early nineties when globalization policies made the earning of foreign exchange a high priority in order to provide debt-servicing.

In 1992, Jaganathan and Krishnammal decided to devote their energy to an intensive "Gram Swarajya Padayatra" (foot march for village self-rule) of what had become Nagai Quaid-E-Milet district. By the end of 1993, it became evident that intensive aquaculture had started to devastate the Sirkali Taluk of the district, creating unemployment, draining the ground water for the prawn tanks, causing salination of soil and water, polluting earth, sea and rivers with their effluents and waste and in the process not only destroying the local eco-system, but also the entire way of life of local agricultural and fishing communities.

Over the next two years, the Gram Swaraj Movement strengthened Gram Sabhas (village assemblies) and people started interfering with the big machines like bull dozers and earth movers which were used to dig the prawn tanks. They also developed a spirituality inspired by Tamil Saint Ramalinga Adigalar (Vallalar) who is known for his emphasis on self-knowledge and light. Krishnammal herself is a Dalit and has been devoted to social transformation in a way, which goes beyond conventional Gandhian lines.

In 1995, the Tamilnadu Government enacted the Aquaculture Regulation Act which was however favourable to the prawn companies. The government itself promoted intensive Aquaculture for foreign export earnings through advertisement and incentives.[20] Gram Swaraj Movement filed a writ petition in the Supreme Court and got an interim order which prohibited (a) occupation of cultivable land; (b) pumping and sucking of ground water, as well as restricting the spread of prawn farms.

The Supreme Court Interim Order was violated by many companies and Gram Swaraj Movement filed contempt of court against several companies (Bask, Bismi and Swarna Mathsya). In the meantime, the Supreme Court decided to request NEERI (National Environmental Engineering Institute of India)[21] to study the effects of aquaculture in eight coastal states. This report fully established the devastating effects of aquaculture. Based on this and other similar assessments, a revolutionary judgement was given on December 11th, 1996 that all the prawn farms within the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) in the country should be demolished. This was based on a Public Interest Litigation (No. 561 of 1994) of Gram Swaraj Movement. However, the prawn companies exerted pressure on the Central Government and influenced the Ministry to move the Aquaculture authority Bill to scuttle the Supreme Judgement. Against normal procedure, this Bill was first tabled in the Rajya Sabha and passed at the fag end of the Parliament session without discussion, by voice vote. However, from April/May 1997 onwards, Gram Swaraj Movement and many other organizations like the National Fish workers Forum (NFF), Coastal Action Network (CAN), Campaign Against Shrimp Industries (CASI), People Against Shrimp Industries (PASI) have campaigned relentlessly to prevent the Aquaculture Authority Bill from being tabled and passed.

Ironically, the greatest violator of the Supreme Court Judgement was the Aquaculture authority formed in February 1997 by the Ministry for Environment and Forestry. Unavoidably, much of the struggle of Gram Swaraj Movement had to be against the illegal acts of the Authority itself, which, in the view of the movement, constituted contempt of court. Thus, violations and struggles against them have been going on side by side ever since.

Over 80% of shrimp aquaculture farms, covering nearly 75% of the area under shrimp aquaculture in Tamilnadu, lie within the environmentally fragile CRZ. In Nagapattinam and Thiruvarur districts 600 farms are functioning on *pucca* agricultural lands and 400 are within the CRZ. While the farms are viable only for about 5 years, recovery of the salinated land for any other purpose requires thirty years and lots of water. Rice farming employs over ten times the labourers per hectare as does shrimp aquaculture. Fresh ground water gets exhausted and the remaining supplies are polluted. Even drinking water resources are destroyed. Though shrimp farms are a prohibited activity under Section 2 (I) of the CRZ notification of 1991, Justice Ramanujam in his report proposed that aquaculture should be considered as a regulated activity within the CRZ, since it requires good saline water in sufficient quantities. Despite the victory in the Supreme Court in December 1996, no shrimp farms in Tamilnadu have been closed and hundreds of them are functioning within the CRZ.

Criminalization of People's Struggle

Instead of taking action against the violators of the Supreme Court Judgement on CRZ, criminalization of democratic struggle is attempted. On 11th Dec. 2000, the third anniversary of the judgement, 10,000 people, majority of them women, went in procession in Nagapattinam under the leadership of Krishnammal Jaganathan. Simultaneously, 300 supporters from women's Struggle Committee in Chennai were harassed by police, while Jaganathanji and

200 supporters were arrested and released after several hours. Since 1997, Sathyagrahis have again and again entered the lands of prawn companies and demanded their closure. On Quit India Day in 1997, 1000 people entered the 400 acres of Bask farm at Perunthottam. 800 people were arrested and imprisoned in Cuddalore jail for 20 days. On the second day of this agitation, 500 women entered the lands of Magna and Prawnex Companies. They were arrested for a day. From June 9, 1999, Jaganathanji was on a 58 days fast taking only one meal a day. On the 58th day, after demonstration by 5000 women, the State government promised to close all the prawn farms in Nagapattinam district, but later went back on its promise. In January 2000, Jaganathanji declined to accept the Padma Sri Award on Republic Day because of this. He demanded in his letter to the Prime Minister dated 8.2.2000, to implement the closure of prawn farms. Ever since the non-violent action in Dec. 1995, nine false cases have been foisted on the people, implicating nearly 1000 villagers. This leads to continuous harassment and arrests so that people find it difficult to lead a normal life.

The Gram Swaraj Movement demands that under the 73rd amendment of the Constitution, the gram sabha (Village Assembly) and panchayats are entitled to control land, forest, water and all natural wealth. Thus, we are facing a situation where the State constantly violates its own laws and commits contempt of court.

Women in Mass Movement: Caste/Class Alliances against Globalization

It has become evident that land, urban and rural, is a key factor in all these abovementioned struggles. Land is less and less available to urban and rural poor. Likewise, water, including drinking water, goes more and more out of the reach of people. The tendency is towards privatization of water.

The edge of the struggle against globalization is sharpened by the workers in the informal sector: Construction workers and other manual labourers in the cities, agricultural workers and fish workers in the countryside. Women are in the forefront of each of these struggles, either in alliance with the trade unions or as an integral, yet distinct part of Gram Swaraj Movement.

A large section of workers in each of these movements, especially among the women workers, are also Dalits. They work as Chitthal, household labour, scavengers, vendors, cleaners in police stations, tailors in the cities and as agricultural labourers in the villages. They get massively displaced due to mechanization, land alienation, import liberalization of agricultural goods and export orientation (e.g. prawns). Their food security is affected and the struggle to get registered with the Labour Board appears as a last resort.

The voices of these Dalits – especially Dalit women – are not represented either in mainstream Dalit movements or in "autonomous" women's movements. They need to be recognized in their own right. This is all the more necessary as attempts are afoot to integrate Dalits into the capitalist mainstream. The Bhopal Declaration of January 2002[22] has propagated the integration of American Blacks in American Civil society as a model for remedy of the violation of Dalit human rights in India. This completely neglects the fundamental economic problems of Dalits and Adivasis in India under globalization. The Bhopal conference was called on the initiative of Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister, Digvijay Singh who has tried to make a name for himself with water management in villages, but has become notorious for his brutal suppression of the Narmada struggle. Now he attempts co-optation of Dalits into globalized capitalism. On this background, the voices of unorganized sector workers have also to be made audible as Dalit voices.

Can a Feminist Perspective be Safeguarded?

The question we face is whether, in the "mixed" composition of people's movements in the process of alliance building, can a feminist perspective be identified and safeguarded. This question is not new. Ilina Sen had raised it in her book "A Space Within the Struggle" and Nalini Nayak had raised it with respect to the fish workers in her book "A Struggle Within the Struggle".[23] R. Gita had drawn attention to the specific problems of women in construction work and had also pointed out that the split in the union had to do with the lack of women's participation in decision making.[24] Women within the P.I., during the recent padayatra, expressed frustration at having spent lots of energies on union work while not feeling "recognized" for this work. Does it mean that women have yet again been instrumentalized by the working class movement? There is no doubt that in the historical padayatra from Kanyakumari to Chennai, elderly chitthal women formed an energetic core, marching, singing and dancing with incredible stamina. Likewise, the Gram Swaraj Movement is to a large extent carried forward by the energy of women.

One uniting factor (with a feminist dimension) between these movements is the struggle for total prohibition, which is at the same time a struggle against violence and for education of children. Neither health, nor nutrition, nor safety of limb and life can be safeguarded without curbing alcoholism. Creative non-violence is a uniting factor in all the struggles under review. The prohibition angle is more dominant in the rural situation, while among the men in the unions it is much more difficult to gain support for this issue. However, the urban women workers are deeply convinced of the need to fight for prohibition.

Sustainable livelihoods, access to land and water, right to work and comprehensive social security, food security and freedom from violence – all these are demands which cannot be achieved without fighting globalization, liberalization and privatization. The demand to Quit WTO today unites urban and rural movements. This demand is symbolic of the attempt to counteract the terror of the market and to focus on production of life and livelihood. We can tentatively conclude that the people's movement fighting against globalization, have internalized production of life and livelihood, a feminist conceptualization, to counter production of profit and market totalitarianism. At the same time, all the basic feminist issues like women's participation in decision making, sexual harassment, domestic violence, alcoholism – have not been thought through and resolved in detail in each organization. It is left to the women's movement to do this job again and again.

IV. WHAT MOVES THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT?

Coming back to the initial question whether the women's movement is on the move, it appears that the movement moves on in the broad survival struggles of urban and rural poor and in the alliances, which need to be built in these struggles. Production of life and livelihood versus production for profit permeates the major ecological struggles as well as the struggles of small peasants and workers in the unorganized sector, including fish workers. In the above-mentioned public hearings of the NCW, mechanization was a crucial issue fought against by women. In construction labour, the recommendation by the committee led by justice P.B. Savanth was not to allow mechanized concreting in constructions below 5000 sq. ft. This will lead to major struggles. In gem-cutting, the import of readymade gems was opposed. This questions import policies. Thus, the issues raised in front of the NCW concern the sector as a whole and also raise questions not only of technologies, but also of import liberalization. Likewise, in the fisheries sector, over many years, the women not only had to struggle for their recognition as workers, they also more actively brought to the fore the ecological question, problems of destructive technology and the fact that the fish resource itself is in jeopardy if ban on monsoon trawling is not strictly implemented.

The women's movement in the seventies started off with the struggle against violence. Even at that time, rural struggles against the neglect of the countryside, against the violence of the Green Revolution and the ensuing violence expressed in incidents like the murder of 44 Dalits in Kizhvenmany in December 1968, had already come to the fore.[25]

It has turned out that this struggle against violence comprises not only the whole gamut from domestic violence to communal and caste violence. It also has to relate to the violence of an exploitative science and technology which leads to destruction of the resource base and extinction of species. In the medical field, such technological violence has led to amniocentesis and sex-selective abortions, apart from instrumentalizing women as guinea pigs for new reproductive technologies.

In the field of energy production, highly sensitive issues like nuclear energy, big dams and the connections between dams and bombs have cropped up.[26] This has also led towards the building of peace movements, especially after the Delhi riots of 1984, the destruction of Babri Masjid in 1992, the nuclear tests in Pokhran in 1998 and the communal violence in Gujarat in 2002. In all these crisis situations, women's groups took initiatives in relief-work, documentation, media-work, peace-marches and consciousness raising.

Yet, it has proven extremely difficult to find a cohesive structure for intervention. The party-related women's organizations have picked up issues raised by the autonomous groups and have swung into joint actions, like e.g. the "seven sisters" in Delhi which were very active during the struggle for the Women's Reservation Bill. However, such co-operations are only issue based.

The two major challenges in front of us seem to be the organizational question and the question of inventing a comprehensively non-violent life style in the face of globalization as external onslaught and communalization of politics as internal onslaught. The problem is that destruction is so much faster than constructive work. It can be achieved by money power and opportunism and fast results can be shown. Real transformation is extremely slow and tedious. This is particularly true for gender questions, as socialization practices are very hard to transform. In this sense, even small constructive interventions like child care services and work with adolescent girls are very important. Media work in the vernaculars needs to be expanded. Alternative schools and health work in remote areas cannot be underestimated. Unions in the unorganized sector are of crucial importance, especially those which are clear in their struggle against globalization and communalism. Unfortunately, even a mass organization like SEWA has compromised on these issues and was therefore ineffective after the Gujarat violence, while on the other hand SEWA, Trivandrum has become very active on both counts.

The mainstream of self-destruction is worldwide, as the events of Sep. 11, 2001 and their aftermath have shown. The movements against exploitative globalization and rising fascism are also worldwide, as the battle of Seattle and similar events have shown. The world social Forum has been one such attempt to draw such forces together. It is important to understand that women are not a "sector". But since we are distributed over many sectors, we face the challenge to side with the survival struggles of the dispossessed, the eco-system-people, the Dalits, Adivasis, the Tribals of the North East, the workers in the informal sector, the artisanal life styles. Without this answerability, we will only be able to create enclaves of activity which give some women a space but which also keeps us closed in within a destructive system. With such answerability, we will grow and be a ferment of transformation.

NOTES

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2. Kalpana Kannabiran, Vasant Kannabiran, *De-Eroticizing Assault. Essays on Modesty, Honour and Power*, Calcutta: Stree, 2002.
3. Her article in this volume is an outcome of this history.
4. Gabriele Dietrich, "Can the Women's Movement be a Force Against Communalism?" in: *Women's Movement in India.* Gabriele Dietrich, "Religious Conflicts and Changes in Indian Political Culture" in: *COELI,* No. 70, Summer 1994, pp. 12–27. Gabriele Dietrich, "Women and Religious Identities in India After Ayodhya" in: *COELI,* No.71, Fall 1994, pp. 12–26.
5. See my earlier articles:

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6. Kamakshi Bhate, Mona Daswani, Lakshmi Menon, Manisha Gupte, Padma Prakash, Rima Kashyap, Mira Sawera, Vibhuti Patel (Editorial Collective): *In Search of Our Bodies. A Feminist Look at Women, Reproduction and Health in India*, Bombay: Shakti, 1987.
7. For update on Campaign against Female foeticide see: Sabhu George and P. Phavalam (ed): *Female Foeticide in Tamilnadu. Report of a State Level Consultation in Chennai. Dec 2–3*, 1998, Madurai: SIRD, 2000.
8. See the valuable collection: *Surviving Crisis, Rebuilding Resistance. A Women's Struggle for Sustainable Development in Asia. Perspectives from the Field.* A workshop organized by JAGORI in co-operation with SANGAT and Nepal Women's committee. 11–14 Sep 2001 (Katmandu, Nepal).
9. Nalini Nayak, *A Struggle Within the Struggle*, Trivandrum: PCO Centre, Gabriele Dietrich, Nalini Nayak: *Transition or Transformation? A Study of the Mobilization, Organization*

and Emergence of Consciousness among the Fish workers of Kerala, Madurai: Centre for Social Analysis, 2002.

10. Ilina Sen: *A Space within the Struggle. Women's Participation in People's Movements* (Delhi: Kali for Women, 1990).
11. The papers of this workshop will be published by the Women's Studies Centre of the SNDT University, Mumbai. (*Note:* This paper has been published in EPW Vol. XXXVIII, No. 43, October 25, 2003.)
12. Maria Mies, Claudia von Werlhof: *Women the Last Colony*, Delhi: Kali for Women, 1988.
13. The construction workers' struggle, with focus on women's participation, was documented by R. Gita: "The Tamilnadu Construction Workers' Union" In: Ilina Sen (ed), *A Space Within the Struggle. Women's Participation in People's Movements,* Delhi: Kali For Women, 1990.

    The other research available was done on behalf of National Labour Institute by M.S. Kaveri, "Construction Workers' Unionisation and Gender: A Study of Tamilnadu Construction Workers' Union" in: Cherian Joseph and K.V. Eswara Prasad (ed). *Women, Work and Inequity, The Reality of Gender.* National Labour Institute (New Delhi). The research on the P.I. appears in a study by Eldrid Margeli, *Organising Women's Protest. A Study of Political Styles in Two South Indian Activist Groups,* Nordic Institute of Asian Studies Monograph Series No. 72. Curzon Press, 1997.
14. Project Management Group, Madras, *Storm Water Drainage Master Plan for Madurai LPA and Surroundings* (Nov. 1992).
15. The gas leak in the Union Carbide Plant in Bhopal on Dec. 3, 1983, was the largest industrial accident in human history and opened the eyes of ordinary people in India and abroad to the callousness of Multinational Corporations and democratic governments. The literature on the subject is vast, but one of the most moving and striking accounts is the book by T.R. Chouhan, *Bhopal – The Inside Story*, Goa: The Other Press, 1994.
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18. For general background of Bhoodan/Gramdam Movement, see: Detlef Kantowsky, *Sarvodaya, The Other Development,* Delhi: Vikas, 1980.
19. The Bodhgaya Movement is also documented in Govind Kelkar and Chetna Gala, "The Bodhgaya Struggle", Ilina Sen, op. cit., pp. 82–110.
20. See David Cherian, *Aqua Culture in Tuticorin and Cochin. Its Effect on Eco-System and People.* March 1995, M.Th. Thesis, Centre for Social Analysis. See also LAFTI Report 1993 to 1997, People's Action to protect the Coastal Ecology, Vinobha Ashram, Kuthur, 1997.
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22. The Bhopal Declaration adopted by the Bhopal Conference: *Charging a New Course for Dalits for the 21st Century*, Bhopal, Jan. 12–13th 2002.
23. Ilina Sen, *A Space Within the Struggle*. Nalini Nayak, *A Struggle Within the Struggle*, Trivandrum: PCO.
24. See above Note 13.
25. See also Gail Omvedt's article "The Rural Roots of Women's Liberation" in: *Social Scientist*, Dec 1975.
26. See the political writings of Arundathi Roy, especially "The Greater Common Good" and "The End of Imagination" and the ensuing debates on Dams and Bombs.

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